

FEBRUARY 1998



# InterZone

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Keith Brooke

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and an interview with

Stephen Gallagher

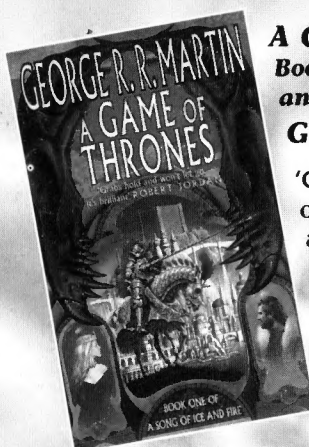




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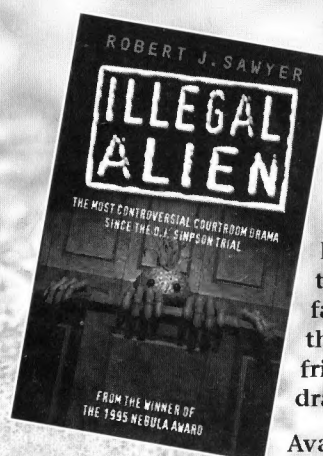
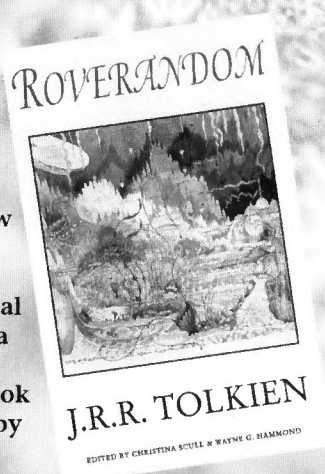
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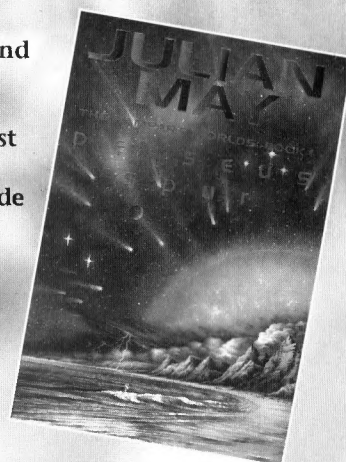
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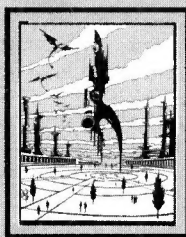
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# interZone

February 1998

128

science fiction & fantasy

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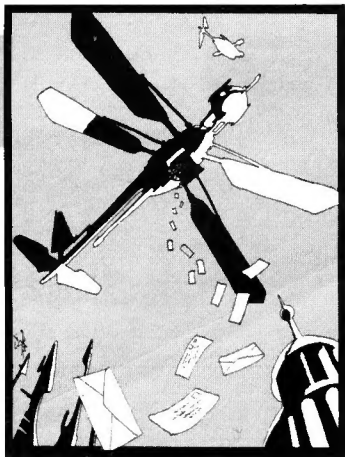
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## + Interaction + Interaction +

Dear Editors:

I heartily share David Burrows's outrage ("Interaction," *IZ* 124) at Gollancz's failures on behalf of M. John Harrison's superb *Signs of Life*. I should point out however that not only was I able to buy two copies of the novel in Hatchard's, but when I asked for it there – having already looked under sf and general fiction – the assistant recommended it enthusiastically.

They'd put it in the thriller section because they thought that's where it had the best chance. In Manchester Dave Britton, Mike Butterworth and others were able to buy several copies in Waterstones, and elsewhere others were able to find it in most large Dillons and Waterstones. More than one person reports similar enthusiasm for the book in the shop itself. This looks like a further demonstration of what we're seeing increasingly – unlike publishers, by now irredeemably concerned with their corporate convulsions, the booksellers and their readers are still pretty much living in the real world.

For all this year's familiar complaints from the Booker judges about how 1997 was a poor year for fiction, I believe it's actually been a very good year for fiction in the real world. *Signs of Life*, perhaps Harrison's finest novel so far, made it an outstanding one.

*C'est la guerre.*

*Hasta la vista!*

**Mike Moorcock**  
Lone Pines, Texas

Dear Editors:

While David Burrows is entitled to his opinion of our publication of Mike Harrison's *Signs of Life* (*IZ* 124), there are various wrong assumptions in his letter which need to be corrected before they become accepted fact.

*Signs of Life* was commissioned in August 1992 by the late Richard Evans as the first book in a two-book contract, the typescript to be delivered no later than December 31, 1993. Gollancz then sold paperback rights on to Malcolm Edwards at Flamingo (HarperCollins), largely because Malcolm had been Richard's predecessor as Mike's editor and

wanted to remain involved. When the typescript was delivered in December '95, almost exactly two years late, Richard had come to feel that Mike more properly belonged in the more "literary" end of the list, which I took over in '94. (I know, I know, but it's what Richard thought, all right?)

As someone who would happily abolish hardbacks altogether if he could, I was naturally disappointed to discover that we could only publish *Signs of Life* in hardcover, especially since I was busy planning for what was to become the Indigo list. Nevertheless I was happy to be Mike's editor. But you have to be realistic: of course the book's main market is in paperback; as Mr Burrows says himself, "Booksellers won't buy in a hardback of that price unless they know it will sell (or are certifiably insane, or know excellent alternative fiction when they see it)." (Is it, by the way, really fair to blame publishers for this state of affairs? You might as well say, "If only the public got off their arses and bought more books we could make them cheaper.") But a contract is a contract, according to which *Signs of Life* should be appearing as a Flamingo paperback some time next spring, presumably plastered with all the terrific reviews the hardback has received.

One last point, contrary to what Mr Burrows suggests, the Gollancz arse is trim and streamlined and not at all outdated, and we get off it frequently.

**Mike Petty**

Victor Gollancz Ltd, London

Dear Editors:

Laurie Jones's letter in issue 125 caught my attention, if only because I personally am rather fond of alternate-history stories. Your reply was clear enough, but there are also a couple of other things that I think need saying.

Of course, alternate histories have a long and continuing existence outside the sf genre, both as literary devices for "mainstream" novelists and as amusements and thought-experiments for professional historians. However, they also have a respectable place within the genre – or rather, within the twin genres of sf and fantasy, which are *Interzone's* declared subject.

To begin with, there is a rather crude technical element. As soon as writers began treating time-travel at all seriously, the possibility of changing the past – and hence of creating an alternative history – came into play. There are stories in which the time-travel (which I think is universally accepted as an sf subject) is the kernel of the plot, and an alternate history is a passing consequence thereof. Similarly, writers may wave their hands a

little over ideas from quantum mechanics, and work from there into stories of "cross-time" adventure. But other writers may become happily engaged in the alternate history itself.

So an sf writer who wants to write an alternate history story may frame it with a paragraph or two in which some time-traveller squashes a neolithic butterfly, and then returns "home" to discover the consequences, or with a dry filing-index entry from some Bureau of Cross-Temporal Observation. A "mainstream" writer is less likely to bother with such tricks. But if we are too picky in our definitions of sf, we end up insisting that the framing paragraphs drag the story in or out of the genre – which strikes me as clumsy.

But I'm more interested in the question of whether an alternate history is *inherently* sf. The question could be – is history a science? That's a matter of semantics; I don't think that it is, really, but it is an organized and rationalizable field of study, and hence is susceptible to the kind of thought-experiments that sf traditionally applies to physics or engineering or anthropology. On those terms, alternate histories are the hard sf of historical "science."

Actually, though, I think that alternate histories cover a range from fantasy to quasi-hard sf. At one end of the scale are exhibits such as Newman and Byrne's "USSA" stories. I'm not as taken with these as some people, but I recognize what they are doing; essentially, they are pop-culture fantasies, playing games with our ideas of the world and its inhabitants. Paul Di Filippo's "The Happy Valley at the End of the World," which also appeared in *IZ* 125, is further into the sf category; its point of divergence is a little implausible, and its atmosphere is a little dreamlike, but it is nonetheless about historical people reacting semi-plausibly to its divergent history. And at the hard-sf end of the scale sits Stephen Baxter and Simon Bradshaw's "Prospero One" (*IZ* 112), with its worked-through depiction of a UK space programme that might have been.

And I suppose that this continuum is one of the fascinating things about alternate history; it runs from the borders of elfland fantasy to the common rooms of academia. (Hugh Trevor-Roper apparently said that "History is not merely what happened: it is what happened in the context of what might have happened. Therefore it must incorporate, as a necessary element, the alternatives, the might-have-beens.") Long may *Interzone* support it.

**Phil Masters**

Home Page: [http://ourworld.compuerve.com/homepages/Phil\\_Masters](http://ourworld.compuerve.com/homepages/Phil_Masters)



Dear Editors:

On the subject of mainstream writers of sf (following the discussion in *IZ* 125): some time ago I received a copy of *Twenty Twenty* by Nigel Watt to review for my local paper. As I haven't re-read in the three years since my memory is slightly sketchy. My strongest impression was that it wasn't just a "literary" novel in sf clothing but a genuine, intelligent science-fiction novel. Though using two sf standards, virtual reality and future plague, the author seemed to have an awareness of the genre unlike, say, Paul Theroux in *O-Zone*. A very impressive novel, especially for a first sf work.

**Martin Lewis**

*Bradford*

Dear Editors:

I've just read Katherine Roberts's letter (issue 125) about your publication of my "The Grass Princess." I'm glad Katherine liked the story so much, but I don't know if I'd want to see more stories very like "The Grass Princess" in *Interzone*. I only suggested it to the editors because of the World Fantasy Award. Having read her letter I took another look at the contents of issue 125 of *IZ*, featuring a fable about Death, an alternate history about legendary aviator Antoine de St-Exupery, another fable about death (and heavenly visions) and, let me see, something poetic about extinction events?

The magazine's boundaries already seem fairly permeable. I only wish more women, not fewer, could manage to tough it out and publish science fiction *novels* instead of media tie-ins, fantasy or "dark fantasy." But that's probably not going to happen within the genre. The climate is just not right in this country. As to why this should be: any thoughts of serializing C. P. Snow, dear editors?

**Gwyneth Jones**

*Brighton*

Dear Editors:

Alison Page ("Interaction," *IZ* 125) either doesn't understand or disregards my artistic (as opposed to political) objection to Ian Watson on the *Belgrano*, but her suggestion that the sinking may have profoundly affected the outcome of the Falklands War and by direct consequence that of the next general election in the UK has substance. How about this scenario:

*Belgrano* is loftily allowed to escape the war zone, as not being worth powder and shot. Outside, it makes rendezvous with the single Argentine aircraft carrier (which in reality never left port, possibly because its engines were US). They sneak back into the zone, and between them sink or incapacitate *Invincible*.

That renders the Task Force incapable of completing its task, and what remains of it limps home, leaving some scores of soldiers to be ransomed

at humiliating expense via the Red Cross. Mrs Thatcher comes under attack from the right of her party (for not winning the war by direct or indirect use of the nuclear option) and from the left (for not giving Galtieri what he wanted under the best figleaf negotiable) and kills herself/has a nervous breakdown/is dismissed as party leader and has no option but to resign as premier. The new premier Whitelaw/Howe/Heseltine either loses a vote of censure or calls a general election in order to avoid one. Michael Foot is returned on much the same manifesto that he presented in 1983, with the sort of majority Tony Blair now enjoys. (It's widely believed (but impossible to prove) that Galtieri was in such a hurry to invade because he knew Thatcher was unpopular, and was keen to achieve a *fait accompli* before the UK came under the control of such an unequivocally masculine man as Michael Foot.)

Now let someone write a novel/novella/whatever, about the next five years in the UK, from whatever political perspective he/she likes. Better still, let's have several, covering the whole range from (say) Pournelle to Watson.

**Chris Gilmore**

Dear Editors:

*Re:* the naff practice of sticking chapters of forthcoming books at the ends of books ("Books Received," *IZ* 125, p65); I wish this were confined to *Star Trek* novels and their ilk, but sadly it isn't – for instance it seems to be very common in US editions of crime novels. To take one example, by relatively classy writer James Hall, I recently finished one of his novels only to find (on reading the free chapter – wish I hadn't now!) that the main character's love interest cops it in the next book – doh! Sort of spoiled the enjoyment of the one I'd just finished. As you imply, it's a bit of swindle really.

**Alastair Reynolds**

*Netherlands*

Dear Editors:

It was very satisfying to read Nick Lowe putting the boot into the makers of *Contact* ("Mutant Popcorn," *IZ* 126). I was ready to forgive them almost anything: the schmaltzy music, the cute-ified childhood flashbacks, the recycled Clinton speech about the Antarctic/Martian meteorites (as if no one would remember), even lumbering poor Jodie Foster with that wooden one-night stand when she should have been ignoring the sign they hung around her blind colleague's neck that read "No sex please, I'm disabled." I was prepared to forgive them all of it, for the sake of the things they got right: the opening tracking shot away from the Earth (never mind that they fudged the radio signals and made Jupiter seem light years away, it still worked); Foster shouting *real jargon* full of right ascensions and declina-

tions as she rushed to the telescope control room when the signal from Vega came through; the moment of sheer atheistic courage, the triumph of curiosity over terror, as she sat in the aliens' machine reciting, over and over through the static, that she was ready to go.

But the ending was unforgivable. Beyond all issues of the lack of respect for Sagan and Druyan, it was the most contrived, intellectually dishonest betrayal of the audience imaginable. What a pack of worthless whores.

Best wishes.

**Greg Egan**

*Perth, Australia*

Dear Editors:

I was interested in Brian Stableford's article on Hugo Gernsback in *IZ* 126. I have a lot of respect for Brian's writings, and he's usually meticulous in his research, but for the first time ever in reading one of his pieces I found myself shaking my head on more than one occasion and becoming a little despondent.

I spent several years researching and writing a book about Gernsback's contribution to sf – *The Gernsback Days* – which would have been published by Starmont House some years ago had it not been for the unfortunate death of publisher Ted Dikty. The book's been with Borgo Press ever since and I hope it will be out next year. In producing that book I read through all the issues of all of Gernsback's pre-*Amazing* technical magazines and have copies of all of the stories and most of the speculative science articles. So when Brian says on p48 that "there is no conspicuous evidence that Gernsback had any interest in science fiction per se" I find myself wondering about the depth of Brian's research. The argument hinges, no doubt, on the use of the phrase "science fiction," but it is evident from the rest of the article that Brian is emphasizing the scientific basis of sf – he talks elsewhere about *Amazing's* "noble ambition" as perhaps being non-evident and also about Campbell's approach to sf being from a more scientific base.

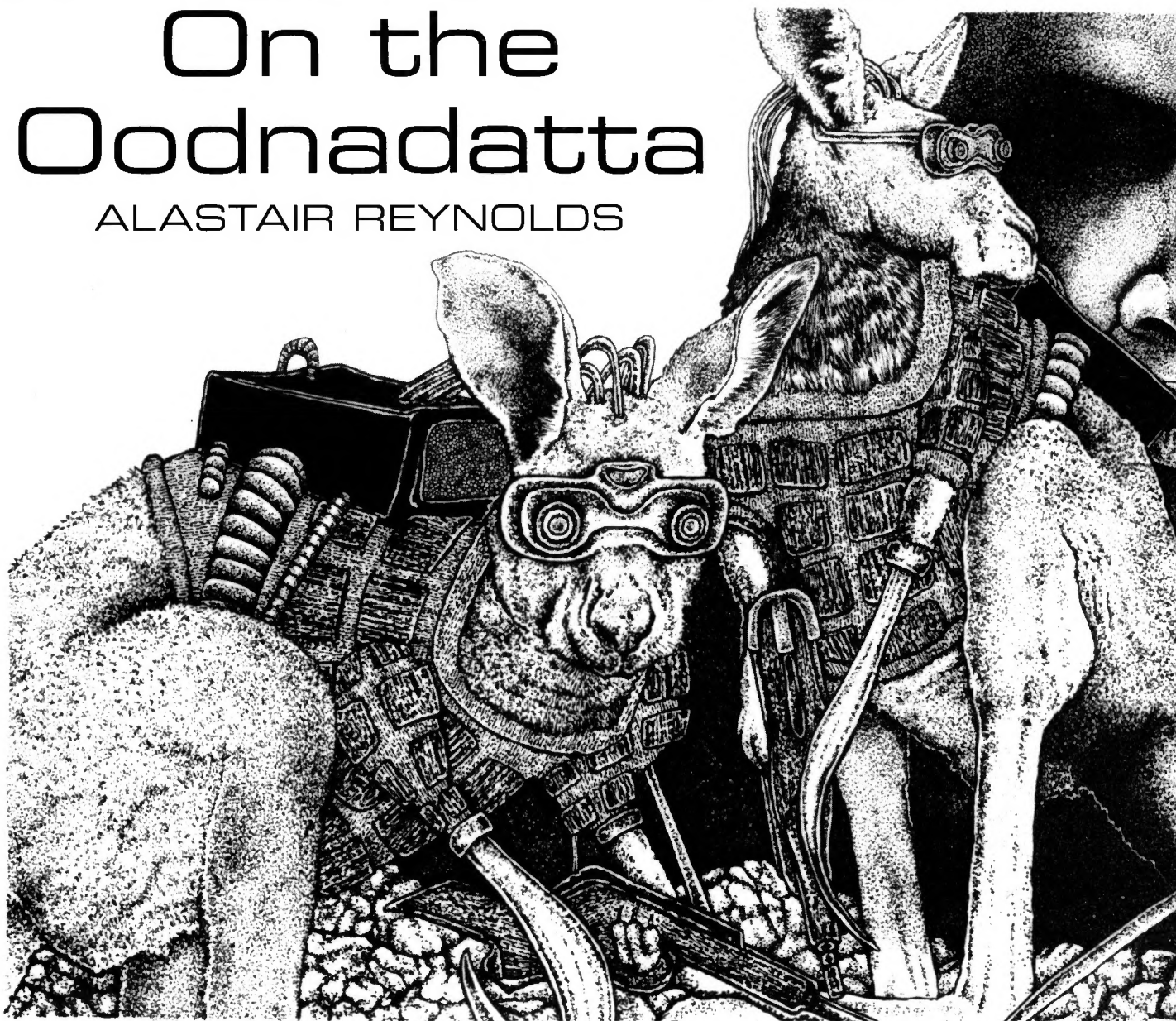
It is evident to me that Brian has not had the opportunity to work through Gernsback's entire publishing corpus. If he had the evidence would have struck him forcibly. I won't go into it all here – my book follows that thread throughout – but I cannot emphasize too strongly that Gernsback was a total devotee of science fiction, and in his use of the phrase it meant fiction that inspired readers to explore the potential of science. Most of the early stuff he published in *Electrical Experimenter* and *Science & Invention* was deliberately "experimenter" fiction or gadget fiction, and certainly has little in common with sf

*letters continue on page 30*



# On the Oodnadatta

ALASTAIR REYNOLDS



He was staring into the distance, doing his best not to catch anyone's eye, but not wanting to sit scrutinizing his coffee like some *mestizo* kid avoiding trouble. Muller didn't especially care whether he walked into it or not. What he didn't like was finding it in a place where he hadn't yet sussed the pecking order; who he could and couldn't trust.

Luckily, enough was happening to justify his gaze.

Through the roadhouse's big window, twin-prop planes were coming and going from the adjacent airstrip. Trucks as well; the road trains came through here on their way to the Cadman stock stations strung out along the Birdsville Track, or south to Adelaide. In daylight, trailing plumes of dust, the trains seemed to take forever to come and go – but it was getting toward dusk now – the sky purple, washed by streaks of orange behind the mulga trees – and the trains only turned on their headlights near settlements.

"Wakey," the man said, snapping his fingers in front of Muller's eyes. "Cadman doesn't pay you to daydream, mate."

The man was hatted, his wiry form almost lost in a checked zip-up jacket with a fleeced collar.

"Mr Rawlinson?"

The man decommissioned Muller's coffee dregs into a nearby pot plant. "But you can call me Rawlinson. Got your gear, have you? There's a plane waiting for us. Some old girl's conked out on the Oodnadatta."

Muller snatched his grip and toolkit from under the table. "A road train?"

"Yeah, a road train. Not that we get much else out here, you know." Rawlinson walked to the despatch desk and picked up a couple of dockets. "Sign yourself out mate."

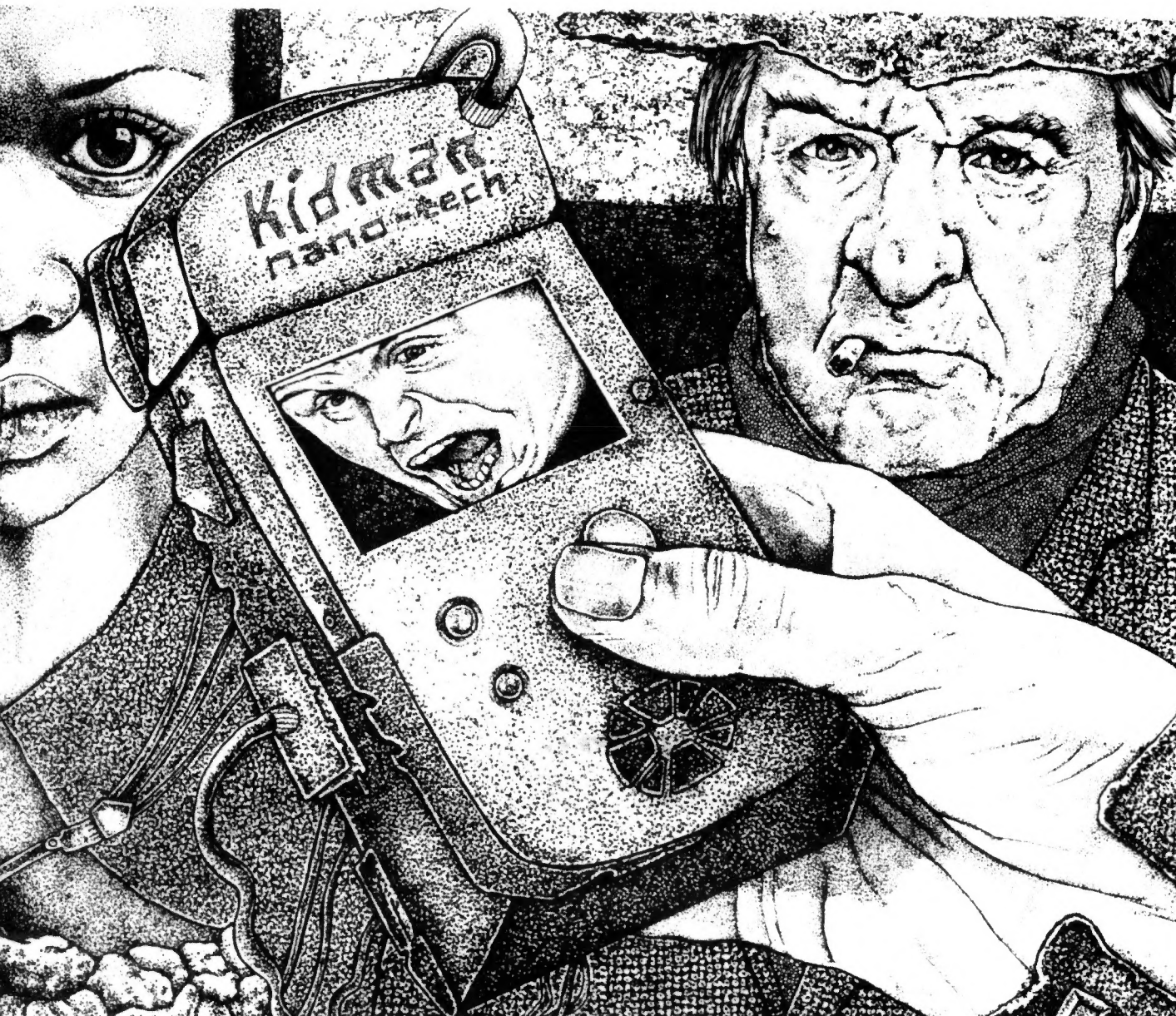
Muller wrote his name carefully in the log book, Rawlinson looking over his shoulder. "Juan Muller," said the big Australian. "What are you, some kind of mongrel? Had you down for a Kraut. Look like you've got a bit of Abo in you as well. No offence or anything."

"I'm a Chilean," Muller said, for what seemed like the thousandth time since arriving in Perth. "Many of my countrymen have German surnames. As for my ancestry, I'm Mestizo, half-Indian."

If any of that impressed Rawlinson he didn't show it. "Got road trains in Chile?"

They walked out into the warm dusk air. "Not road trains," Muller said. "But heavy trucks work the Pan American Highway. And diesel locomotives on the rail-





Illustrations by Russell Morgan

way, hauling iron-ore and nitrates to Santiago. I have worked on many sorts of vehicle, Rawlinson; many kinds of diesel, gas-turbine and electric engine, as well as hydraulics, drag-lines, container derricks, tower cranes and robot clipper ships."

"I didn't ask for your bloody curriculum vitae. What matters is if you can stick it out here working for Cadman."

"The office in Perth seemed to think so."

They were approaching a twin-prop, basking under the strip's floods, navigation lights pulsing.

"They also tell you we use trannies?"

"Trannies?"

Rawlinson popped a hatch on the side of the plane and slung his kit into the hold. "Transients, mate. Cadman owns 'em, see? Well, not Cadman, exactly, but the slant conglomerate which owns Cadman. Worked with transients before, haven't you?"

"Not exactly."

"What does that mean?"

"In Chile transients are uncommon, Rawlinson. We're still a very..." Muller hesitated, not wanting to make either himself or his countrymen sound backward. "Conservative country."

"C'mon, even the bloody Pope okayed them. I thought you lot were all bead-fiddlers south of Panama."

Muller didn't feel like getting into this discussion, not right now. Instead, he just threw his grip in after Rawlinson's kit. "It's not my job to deal with the transients, anyway. In Valparaiso I took many courses in mechanics, but not in psychology."

"That doesn't matter. Out here a bloke just muddles through until he gets the hang of it. Experience is what counts, mate. Like this hat, see?"

Muller studied the dark thing on Rawlinson's head. "Nice as pie when I bought it," said the man. "But too stiff. So I left it out on the Birdsville and let a few trains run over it. After that I liked it a lot better."

They were aloft, just the two of them up front in the twin-prop's cabin. Rawlinson had slipped the despatch docket into the dash and the plane had done the rest, hauling itself airborne until it reached the point where its wings canted forward for level flight. Thirty minutes had passed, and now the moon was shining – illuminating endlessly parallel dunes which made it seem as if the plane was only a moth, hovering above a corrugated iron roof.



"Do Cadman's cows eat sand?" Muller asked.

"Of course they bloody don't. You should see this place after a good rainstorm. Overnight bloody wheat-field." Rawlinson stubbed out his cigarette. "Anyway, stop gawking and call up the dossier. We'll be landing in a few minutes."

Muller unlatched a battered sleevetop and paged it open, scrolling until he found the file which held documentation on Cadman's fleet.

"Here's the rego," Rawlinson said, handing him the despatch docket. Muller noted the number and scrolled down the dossier list, until he found the match. "Mack, is it?"

"Mitsubishi. Gas-turbine."

"All we need. Bloody Jap rigs can't take the dust, see."

The despatch had been alerted when the train hadn't checked in at the Anna Creek station, on its way south with a full load of Cadman cattle. The train's navsat beacon put it 30 kilometres below Oodnadatta, but there was nothing about why it had broken down.

"Let's just hope it's a broken blade," Rawlinson said. "Cause the last thing I feel like doing is arguing with a tranny."

"You argue with them?"

"Sweet talk 'em mate. Persuade them to get on with the job." Muller felt the plane nose down, like there was suddenly too much wax in his ears. "Course, sometimes I can't be bothered, or they just don't get the message. That's why we always carry a few spares in the back of the plane."

"Spares?"

"Trannies, mate." Rawlinson chuckled. "Don't worry, you'll get used to it."

Muller thought he could see the broken-down train some way ahead, perched on the edge of the Oodnadatta road, etched across the corrugated iron like a slug track. A red light on the instrument panel started flashing, synched with a piercing electronic tone. Muller had no more than a second to worry about it before Rawlinson leant over and flicked a switch, turning the light amber and silencing the noise.

"Nothing to worry about, Paco," he said. "Just the train saying hello."

"Hello?"

"Checking us over." Rawlinson excavated something from his nose, scrutinized it, then secreted it under the panel. "Cadman doesn't advertise it, but some of the trains'll defend themselves if they feel threatened."

"Who'd attack a train?"

"Sons of Namatjira for one."

Muller nodded. "I read about the Sons in Perth. They have a complaint against Cadman?"

"They say his land overruns sacred ground; that it pisses off the local spirits."

Muller was silent for a moment. "Many of my countrymen would not dismiss such a claim, Mr Rawlinson. Do you believe in spirits?"

"Yeah, I believe in spirits. You go into any Abo settlement and you'll see spirits, Paco." Rawlinson drew in breath. "Trouble is they're mainly of the methylated variety."

*The poodle on Sapphire's lap was a glob of pink cotton-candy with eyes and a ribbon.*

*"Mummy's going away," she said. "For a long time. But you're to be very brave."*

*She'd chosen to chill out; during what the LA MetNet's smartware called – within accepted error norms – the last optimal day of October 2008. If all went well, she would be revived on a similarly optimal day two or three decades down the line. By then, the Nanotopia would have arrived, and every day would be as near optimal as anyone cared. At least that was what she had read.*

*"I've called them," Anton said, emerging from the darkness of the house onto the bright patio. He had been swimming before she asked him to phone the company. Now a black gown hung from his broad shoulders, bare feet leaving sickle-shaped prints on the patio, hair furrowed back from his brow in brilliant grooves. His shades were of a new form-adapting style that faintly disturbed Sapphire, resembling a slab of obsidian inserted in a convenient slot in his face.*

*"The Ultralife team will be here in a few minutes," he said.*

*"You've alerted perimeter security?"*

*"Absolutely. Wouldn't do to shoot down their helicopter, would it."*

*Fifteen years in LA hadn't dented Anton's English accent, still as hard and rectilinear as his sunglasses. Helicopter, he said – never chopper, or anything so crassly imprecise.*

*"Those Stingers were a good buy," she said. "Shame I never got to see them used in anger. But Mark was right. They did their job just by being there." She glared into his shades. "Congratulations. You've got superb taste in boyfriends."*

*Anton smiled. "Actually I spoke to Mark yesterday concerning some rather nasty little surface-to-air jobs the Arabs have got their hands on. Those Stingers are getting rather long in the tooth."*

*"Out of date?"*

*"Mmm. Even the Arizona Buddhist Militia have them now. I think we should consider upgrading to Patriot II's."*

*"Well, we wouldn't want the Arizona Buddhist Militia showing us up, would we." She took a sip on her carrot juice. "Whoever the fuck they are."*

*"You always were ahead of the vogue, Sapphire. Defining it, even. Shame to give all that up now."*

*"Listen, pardon the anachronism, but didn't I make it clear you have a blank cheque as far as maintaining the estate goes? I don't give a rat's hiney about the deals you and Mark cook up, as long as this place is still here in 30 years time." She nodded beyond the veranda. "And I don't want anyone developing those hills before I wake. I don't care who owns them now. You've got 30 years to buy them out, whoever they are. When they revive me I want to wake on this exact fucking patio, and I want the same fucking view, understand?"*

*"Perfectly."*

*"Yeah, well maybe you don't. Read this." Sapphire tossed Anton one of the U-life brochures. "See what they say? There's no reason why deanimation and revival shouldn't be just like taking a little catnap." She watched as the black facet of his glasses tracked over the glossy, like one of the security cams stationed around the perimeter. "You don't even dream. It's just like a slow dissolve. You know what a slow dissolve is, Anton? Like in the vid for..." Sapphire trailed off. She hadn't made a*



promo since Anton was wetting beds, but sometimes she forgot.

"Deanimation," he said, amusedly. "Calling it that makes it seem about as commonplace as colonic irrigation."

"About which you undoubtedly know more than me, honey. But why should they call it anything else? They don't have to, not since '99."

That, of course, was when everything had changed. Californian law had been amended then, making it legally unnecessary for anyone to be dead before they were prepared for chill-out. That legal wrinkle removed the need to even mention the "d" word in any of U-life's publicity material. In 1999 over a thousand deanimations took place; enough business to keep 20 corporate clones of U-life above water. By 2003 – with thousands of the State's richest and middle-richest taking that route yearly – the LA Times even started a separate cryobituarials section. But Sapphire hadn't waited until that stampede; she'd signed up four years before – one of the first 10,000 to do so. Now it was nothing even remotely adventurous. Politicians were doing it. Even a few cosmetic surgeons she could name, and some actors who hadn't managed an unaired pilot since the 80s. Last month there'd been that lounge-bar pianist with the joke recording contract, his tacky farewell bash on the roof of the U-life building. She'd stolen the whole show, her first public appearance in two years; left the pianist sap crying into his pina colada and wondering if he'd crashed the wrong party. Fact was, if Sapphire wasn't already locked into it, she doubted she'd even consider deanimation now. Too damn unoriginal by far.

But, like they said, too late to stop now.

She angled her shades down on her nose and waited until she could hear the suppressed thump of the arriving U-life chopper, scudding safely over the de-armed Stinger missile cordon, over the stepped lawns and the bougainvillaea.

Muller watched things scurry away from the plane's enlarging shadow, strobe-frozen in the red and green ellipses cast by the lights. There was a dead marsupial by the strip, a reptile feasting in its midst. A goanna, they called them. Muller had seen enough at the roadhouse. They weren't dangerous, but they hissed like devils, and could run surprisingly well. He wondered how they tasted – and, judging by the cuisine back at the roadhouse, wondered if he already knew.

"Bring the sleeve," Rawlinson said, once they were down. "Plug it into the rig, see if you can find out why she's stopped. And don't mind the fats – they always get noisy if the trains stop. They think it's the sheds."

Muller nodded and hopped out, using his torch to find his way along the road train's side. There were three trailers hitched behind the Mitsubishi tug, each trailer a slatted box crammed with snorting Cadman stock. Muller did not want to put his face too close to the slats. He could sense the pressure of the animals without seeing them, as if all the cows in each trailer had congealed into a single swelling mass of dough behind the slats. Near the end of the trailer, the side-gate rattled, straining against chains and padlocks with each hoof kick. Muller knelt down each time he passed one of the couplings, angling the torch under the chassis.



"Power-link's ruptured here, Rawlinson," he said, raising his voice above the cattle. "Would that make the last trailer's brakes come on?"

"Nah. We strip out the failsafes before they ever leave the depot." Rawlinson lit a cigarette. "If we didn't, we'd have 'em shutting down on us every hundred yards."

Muller weighed his words carefully. "That doesn't sound especially safe, Rawlinson. If the rig had to stop suddenly, the whole string could jack-knife."

He was thinking of a legendary jack-knife on the Pan American, where the road snaked its way through the Atacama foothills. A tanker had braked too hard to avoid a boulder which had come down in the middle of the road. With defective brakes on the trailer, the whole unit had dog-legged through 90 degrees, projecting the rear half of the tanker over the edge of the road. The tanker's contents had sluiced backwards, until the weight dragged the whole truck over the edge. That was in 2011, back when most of the lines still used drivers. There'd been a shrine by the road ever since, a patiently-tended plaster house with plastic flowers.

"So what?" Rawlinson said. "They're only fats, and there's nobody up front to worry about." He gave Muller a boisterous slap between the shoulder blades. "Now go plug that box in up front."

The rig sat on a six-wheeled chassis, wedge-shaped prow ribbed with bent roo-bars. There were no windows, only a bulbous black projection on the roof which contained the road train's sensor systems and navsat gear, sticking forward like a dinosaur horn. Amber cherry lights turned silently above the prow. It looked mean, and the wheeze of the idling turb sounded like a prolonged bestial exhalation.

Muller flipped open the sleevetop port, spooled out the optical cabling and hooked in. A few moments later the road train's ID and diagnostics dribbled across the screen. The numbers were difficult to interpret, so Muller made the sleeve graph up a holo of the engine – lasered onto his eyes, so that the turb seemed to hover above his sleeve. He clipped the torch onto his belt, using his free hand to remove parts of the engine holo until the blades were visible. Monocrystal jobs, according to the spec, so it was highly unlikely one had shattered. But who knew what the dust out here was capable of, or what corners Cadman had cut.

But the blades were clean, not even running hot.

Muller checked the rest, but he'd known the turbine was sweet almost from the moment he'd heard it. The only reason it was running slow was because the driver had pulled over. Except, as he reminded himself, there was no driver. Only software – and even that wasn't really the case.

Rawlinson was kicking the tyres when Muller caught up with him on the other side of the train. "Nothing crook, is there."

"The rig's fine, Rawlinson. Mechanically, at least. I suppose that isn't what you wanted to hear."

Rawlinson's moonlit form shrugged. "When these mongrels blow a gasket they generally squirt a sick-note up to the navsat. This time there wasn't one."

Muller nodded, having the uncomfortable feeling Rawlinson had been testing his competency. "We should get her moving again, I think. Those cows don't sound very happy. You Australians like your beef more than

Argentinians."

"Beef?" Rawlinson made an odd spluttering noise, and Muller watched the orange firefly of his cigarette arc groundwards. "You'd be lucky to squeeze a stock cube out of that lot."

For a moment Muller wondered if his English had failed him – or at least failed Rawlinson. "Are you saying Cadman's cows aren't for beef?"

"Not this consignment, Paco." Rawlinson knuckled the slats, seemingly oblivious to the overpowering bovine stench which erupted between them. "Comes down about twice a week. Looks like all the others, except the serial number on the docket's different – and they always plane us out to fix one of these first, even if there's a regular consignment going green somewhere else."

"Then all the other trains carry –" Muller hesitated, knowing that what he was about to say would sound ridiculous. "Beef cows?"

"Yeah."

Muller hesitated on the threshold of his next question, again wondering if Rawlinson was testing him. "Then what are these cows for, if they aren't for eating?"

"They're pregnant."

"Ready to calf?"

Muller caught Rawlinson's amused squint. "Yeah, Paco. Ready to calf. Which is why we have to get this Jap shit moving again. Wouldn't want 'em popping before Adelaide, would we?"

Muller heard the side-gate rattle again, amazed it had lasted until now without breaking. "You think the problem's with the transient, don't you?"

"You get a nose for these things," Rawlinson said, implying it was a skill Muller would likely never acquire. "You got the dossier handy? Call up the doco."

He meant the biography of the transient currently driving – or not, as it happened – the Cadman road train. Muller worked the sleevetop and found it in a few seconds. "What do you want to know?"

"Who we're dealing with would be a start."

He meant the transient's name. "Blaine Dubois," Muller said, nodding. "Do you know this one?"

"Sure I do. Put him in myself." Rawlinson levered up his hat and scratched at the wire wool beneath. "Went under in about 2008, right?"

"You have a good memory, Rawlinson."

"You don't forget a name like that in a hurry. Piano player or something. Shirt lifter, probably. Must have made a bob or too as well. Anyway, most of Cadman's trannies come from '08. There were more in that year than in the five before. 'Course, there were hardly any from '09."

"The Big One," Muller said wistfully. "I remember hearing about it as a child, when I came home from school in Mendoza."

"They teach you to read at your school?"

Muller frowned. "Of course."

"Then hit that fucking scroll button. Don't want to stand around here all night."

*One thing about U-life; they didn't piss around.*

*Sapphire watched their chopper execute a faultless landing on the asphalt; crew drop and immediate dust-off, as if the pilot had logged hours inserting infiltration*



squads into Central American rainforest. Which, she supposed, was quite probable. And wouldn't that be a pisser: it was only 20 years since she'd recorded a particularly sanctimonious track for that album protesting against US involvement in Nicaragua; the one with the overproduced singalong finale. Right now the chopper was bottle-green, with a big Egyptian eye painted on one side, camouflaged as the traffic-monitoring chopper of a fictitious LA television station. But Sapphire knew from the brochure that if she wished, the pilot could throw a switch in his cockpit and the chopper's smart paint-pixels would immediately flick over into the U-life corporate colours. Depended on exactly how much publicity she wanted.

None, was the short answer.

Maybe if all this was a year or two ago... or if her dickbrained hippie parents were still around and she could still aggravate them in public, or if her career wasn't stalled in some kind of terminal power-dive...

The team-leader was flattening his hair back down, ruffled by the downdraught from the chopper. He was the only one wearing a suit; a vile electric pink she wouldn't have inflicted on a poodle. His chin jutted, making it seem as if he was constantly clenching his teeth. Four green-coated cryomedics came behind, one pair lugging a gurney, the other two weighed down with chunky plastic boxes, sprouting dayglo plastic pipes and digital readouts, emblazoned with medical decals. They looked like kid's toys made fractionally too large. Anton was down there to meet them, ushering them in out of the sun, into the house's hangarlike coolness. A few moments later she heard them pattering up the stairs.

By now the U-life chopper was loitering over the San Bernadino freeway, just one more hovering speck of grit in the chocolate caul of late afternoon smog.

"I'm Leitner," said the suit. "Pleasure to finally meet you, Sapphire."

She winced. The drawback with only having one name – great for product placement, but there was no way anyone could address you without sounding like you'd been intimate for years. Not unless they were exceptionally skilled in nuance, the way they said the Chinese could make one word mean 18 different things.

"Sure, honey, and I bet you've got all my albums. Can we get this shit over with?" She tilted down her sunglasses. "And haven't I seen you somewhere before, recently?"

The guy took that as some kind of compliment, probably. Best not to let the poor sap know it was his chinny-chin-chin which she remembered.

"I was at the Dubois party," Leitner said. "We handled his departure arrangements as well."

"You supposed to disclose that kind of thing?"

"What's to disclose? Mr Dubois made no special provisions."

"Guess he didn't. Probably took the cheapest deal you had on offer, right? The budget special." She made a chopping motion across her throat. "Head only. Or what is it you guys call it? Neural consolidation?" Sapphire's laughter raced away toward the hills. "Great. Kills me every time. What do you call someone with no body? Corporeally challenged?"

"We don't do neurals," Leitner said, not hiding his distaste. "They weren't good for business; at least not the

kind of business we like." Then he nodded to his four assistants, the guys with the gurney and the Fischer-Price doctor's kits. "Maybe we should get to work."

Muller glanced over the remainder of the tranny's sparse biographical data while Rawlinson played a cattle prod through the slats of the rear trailer, making the fats jump around and snort even more than usual. Like the man said, Dubois had gone into cryogenic preservation in 2008, a year before the Big One hit Southern California. The company which had frozen him, Ultralife, had gone to great lengths to insulate their clients. Their cryogenic vaults had been mounted on electromagnetic shock-absorbing bearings to smother the worst effects of any quake, and each had carried its own six month backup radioisotope generator, capable of supplying juice to the refrigeration unit even if the rest of LA went back to the Flintstones. Which, indeed, had almost been the case. The quake had been bad enough in its own right, but then the *Chernorange* meltdown had happened.

Still, there was too much real estate there to go begging. In the end it had been the Greater Singaporeans who cleaned up most of the mess, and the Greater Singaporeans who eventually unearthed the Ultralife cryogenic vaults. Lacking either the rights of the living or the sanctity of the dead, the legal status of the frozen had been murky to say the least. While best legal expert systems money could buy were locking antlers in cyberspace, the Singaporeans quietly spirited the frozen out of the country.

A year later everyone had forgotten about them. But they hadn't been lost. They were waiting in a vault a mile beneath Singapore, until technology and – by necessity – economics, progressed to the point where they could be revived.

In the end, technology got there first. And by then, Greater Singapore happened to own most of Australia.

*For a long time Sapphire experienced nothing.*

There was no sensation, no low-level consciousness, not even dreams. But somehow – when the nothingness ended – Sapphire felt as if she had come through something which had lasted for a longer period of time than she could easily name. It was like slipping a cassette into a VCR, and waiting through an eternity of static before the copyright notice scrolled up, except there was a complete absence of cheesy music.

The first thing she experienced – and for several years the only thing – was the time. Rendered in big red letters, like the digital face of an old bedside alarm. It appeared to be the only thing in her universe; floating less in blackness than in a limbo of nonexistence. She could neither ignore nor look away from the clock, and she found it virtually impossible to imagine anything lying beyond the clock, or around it. Sapphire wasn't stupid, so it didn't take her too long to figure out that the clock was being projected into her brain; all extraneous data carefully filtered from her sensorium.

For some time she was aware of the clock, without actually registering what it told her. But gradually – it was impossible to guess after how long – Sapphire took notice of what the clock was saying. It ought to have been shocking, except in her present state Sapphire was

really not capable of being shocked. What she experienced was more a feeling of mild perturbation.

She'd gone under in 2008. Now – according to the clock – it was 2024. And she'd barely had time to deal with the unreality of that before the final digit in the year incremented by one, and it was 2025. A little while later, 2026. The months were slamming past, and the pair of digits which counted the days of each month were locked in a perpetual blur. It looked corny, like the old movie cliché of the fluttering calendar pages or the rushing train wheels.

Except this was real, or at least she assumed so.

But it hadn't been in the contract, not as far as she remembered. According to Ultralife's publicity material, Sapphire was not meant to experience anything at all during her chill-out. Maybe a few odd sensations during the immediate pre-revival period (they were just covering their backs on that one, as no one had actually developed the technology) but nothing like this.

It was 2028 now. But dammit if something hadn't changed. The blurring day-digits were still changing illegibly fast, but the months did not seem to be changing quite as rapidly. More than that, the gap between the years seemed to be lengthening, slowly but surely. Sapphire watched – not so much fascinated as totally compelled – as the year became 2029, and then – slowing perceptibly now – 2030. By 2031 the rate of slow-down was steepening. She could make out individual days now, and she felt a perverse stab of loss as her birthday whipped past, uncelebrated.

By 2032 time was positively crawling. By late May the days were changing at a subjective rate of only one every ten or so seconds (whatever that meant), and the rate seemed to have stabilized. In early June the clock changed, gaining detail which had not been present before. No longer just a sequence of hovering red numerals, it had gained a body, encased in wood-effect plastic, with little fold-down legs. A perfectly realized digital alarm-clock, floating in limbo. In mid June the clock receded, until the face was only a quarter of its previous size. Smoothly a whole room bloomed into existence around it. The clock lay on a bedside table, next to a vase of flowers. Autumnal sunlight slanted through the room's one window, teased and filtered by trees moving in a soft breeze.

It looked like a private room in a hospital; comfortable but not exactly opulent. Vaguely out-of-date as well. There was a television at the foot of the bed, on a grey metal cantilever. The whole obsolete unit was surrounded by the same wood-effect plastic as the alarm clock.

The television came on.

"Shit," said Rawlinson.

Muller heard the metal bolts snap like a series of rifle shots, almost too close together to separate in his head. Then there was a squeal of tortured metal as the train's slatted side gave way, folding down against the pressure of the fats behind it like a collapsing dam wall. What followed was a tidal surge of half-tonne animals; cows pouring from the innards in a single brown torrent. It was only then that Muller understood how densely those cows had been packed into the train. The force was released with such suddenness that the first three or four animals did not have time to jump down before

they were overwhelmed by the bovine tsunami pushing behind them. They simply fell out, and disappeared under the blurred hoofs of the other cows. Above the echoing thunder, Muller heard a cacophony of snorting and – faintly – something else. The something else was a sound he had not expected from animals like this: a kind of squealing or crying. If he had not known otherwise it might have struck him as human.

Rawlinson had gotten himself out of the way just in time, and was now making a futile attempt to stem the flood with the cattle prod, an activity whose sole outcome seemed to be that of making the escaped animals even more furious and panicked than before.

Muller glanced at his watch. Now, he thought, was as good as time as any to do what he had come to do, and the cows would provide an excellent diversion.

He reached into his jacket pocket, removed a hand-phone and punched numbers.

The television showed some kind of logo for a moment, but not one Sapphire recognized. Then she was looking at a suit, looking at her from behind a desk, hands clasped solemnly before him. The guy was in his 60s, but pretty well-preserved; good tan. Did she know him from somewhere? The general air of paternalistic over-sincerity he exuded reminded Sapphire of a presidential address. Maybe the guy was about to tell her they'd nuked some towel-heads.

"Sapphire," he said. "My name is Mr Leitner – you remember me, don't you? I was there when we put you under, back in '08."

"Yeah, I remember you." She was only mildly surprised that speaking came easily. Every other detail seemed to have been taken care of, so it would have been odd if they'd skimmed on something so basic. "Since when did you get the chin straightened out?"

"A long time ago, Sapphire." He smiled, almost as an exercise in demonstrating the remodelled skeletal structure of his jaw. "And I'd love to talk about old times, but I'm afraid there's something of a..." Leitner deliberated. "Shall we call it a crisis, or is that too strong?"

"Better tell me what it is first. Am I still frozen, or what?"

"Definitely," Leitner said. "But it isn't as simple as that. There've been a few changes since you went under – things that weren't foreseen in any of the scenarios."

"So lay it on me."

"Not enough time to go into any real detail." The guy nodded out of the television, toward the alarm clock. "What's happening, Sapphire, is that we're running a model of your brain in a supercomputer."

"Running a model?"

"Simulating your brain. We took your frozen head and scanned it with some fancy new equipment; stuff that can map where all your brain cells are and how they're wired up to each other. Then we took all that information and fed it into the computer, and the computer allowed the model to evolve forward in time."

"And?"

"There is no 'and', Sapphire. You're it. You're the model, right now." Leitner smiled. Behind him, a corporate picture window framed big skyscrapers crowding into the distance; architecture soft and melted like warming ice sculptures. "We got you scanned back in



2020," he said. "But until recently the computer power was so slow that it took months to progress you by just a few subjective seconds. Eventually we had enough spare capacity to start feeding some sensory stimulus into the model, but it was still godawful slow. But things hotted up in the late 20s. By 2032 we'd ported you to one of the new quantum liquid-architecture systems, which meant we could begin to simulate you at a rate only a few hundred times slower than realtime; peanuts in computational terms. By June, we'd gained enough spare capacity to simulate a full environment."

Sapphire had taken all that in, but it hadn't quite percolated down to understanding. "Let me get this straight," she said. "What I'm feeling now – what I'm thinking now – is all going on in some fucking computer somewhere?"

"Jakarta, actually."

Sapphire sniffed. "The least you could have done is simulate me somewhere I haven't been before. I'm amazed I don't feel more pissed about it. I threw televisions out of hotel rooms for less than that."

"Emotional responses aren't well modelled by the system," Leitner said. "Too much messy biochem. We're working on it, but it's all a bit wire-frame at this stage. Think of emotion as being the texture of your modelled mindstate. Our simulation resembles early virtual reality in that respect – very plasticky."

"Like your hair, Leitner. And what about my frozen head anyway – I hope to god it's still intact, or I'm going to sue your asses for every fucking...whatever it is you spend in Jakarta."

"Your frozen body is..." Leitner paused, scrutinized his interlocked fingers. "Currently intact. But I'm afraid that's why I'm talking to you now. The situation isn't optimal."

"What situation?"

"The legal status of your body. After the big one, Ultra-life ceased to exist in the sense that you knew it. Your frozen body, and those of our other clients, were corporate assets. After a number of corporate transactions – all very complicated – the frozen had become someone else's property."

"You're losing me there. What the hell was the big one?" Sapphire hesitated a moment. "No, don't bother. I can guess."

Leitner put up a hand. "You can catch up on the details later – there'll be plenty of time for that. First we have to clear a small technical matter."

Rawlinson showed Muller the hatch in the side of the road train's rig where the transient modules were inserted. After the dust cover had slid back, they had to enter a ten-digit authorization into a keypad, then undergo a retinal laser-scan. Then the inner door whirled aside, exposing the module, which was not much larger than a stack of cards; a blue LED pulsing in its end.

"That's our boy," Rawlinson said. "Doesn't look like much does it?"

"It's working, isn't it?"

"Oh, he's in there. Just doesn't want to work any more."

Muller began to undo the sleevetop, ready to pass it to the other man. "You said you'd try and persuade him."

"I did, didn't I." Rawlinson still had the cattle-prod



in his hand, and Muller got the impression the man would much rather return to the task of agitating the animals. But with a long-winded sigh he entered a few more digits into the keypad, causing a little screen to light up next to the module.

They were looking down on a man.

The man was curled up foetally, in the driving seat of a rig; hard Australian sun blasting in through the windows.

"Hey, Blaine," Rawlinson said. "What do you think you're playing at, stopping this consignment?"

For a long time there was no response from the man in the screen. Then – slowly – he uncurled himself and looked at them, his face pitiful in the harsh glare. "I can't go on," he said. "I can't go on, Mr Rawlinson. I can't do this any more."

"This isn't any old load of cows, you know."

"I know what the load is, Mr Rawlinson. That doesn't change anything. I just can't do it any more."

"There's a word for that, Blaine. Forfeiture. You know what that means, don't you."

"Perfectly." The man's voice was utterly drained of emotion. "I renege on the contract to pay for my recorporeality. And since I'm not currently over-burdened with human rights, you may legally erase me."

Rawlinson nodded appreciatively. "That's about the size of it. At this point I'm s'posed to remind you of just what's at stake... but frankly I get the impression I'd be wasting your time and mine." Then he turned to Muller. "Tell you what, Paco. Get some practise in. See if you can't talk this old girl into finishing the job. But don't raise your hopes."

When Rawlinson was out of earshot Blaine Dubois said: "I'm safe, aren't I? You promised me I'd be taken care of."

"You're safe – no one's going to erase you." Muller reached up with one hand, ready to eject the module, but then hesitated. "You could still finish the job, you know. It depends on how badly you want to live again."

For the first time the transient laughed. "Not this badly," he said.

*"Go on," Sapphire said, thinking that Leitner sounded like one of her old accountants from the 90s, before the software replacements came on the market.*

*"The firm that now oversees your cryogenically frozen body does things differently than Ultralife. And as your legal ties with the new provider are..." Leitner bit his lower lip. "Unclear... they're at liberty to cut certain basic provisions from the terms of contract."*

*"Meaning what?"*

*"Meaning they want to save money by going for full neural consolidation. Are you following me Sapphire?" The slick bastard staring at her out the television, like he was proposing nothing more innocuous than a moderate adjustment of her royalties scale.*

*"Yeah," she said. "I'm following you. You're saying they want to cut my head off, right?"*

*"Per unit cost, its cheaper than full-body jobs. Of course, that wasn't Ultralife's way of doing things – but we're under new management these days."*

*"Yeah," she said. "And isn't it always the same old same old."*

*"If there were any other way..."*

*"Well, obviously there isn't, so why don't you just get the thing over with? Shit, I don't know why you even bothered consulting me. Like I'm gonna refuse, right?"*

*"It's called courtesy," Leitner said.*

*So, of course, they did it – and Sapphire felt nothing, because she was no longer in her head. They even let her watch the procedure on a visual feed into her computer-simulated mind. It was unpleasant, but not because of what they did – rather because of what had become of her body since she went under. It didn't look right; all bruised and shrivelled and ruptured, like one of those guys they occasionally dug up in Siberia; like she'd been encased in a glacier for a few thousand years. She understood that every cell in her body had been ruined by expanding ice crystals, and that, while the requisite nanotechnology existed to repair each of them, it was far too expensive and laborious to actually do.*

*Later, when the company said it was going to have to destroy her head as well, she felt nothing but the sense of relief one might get from clearing out an attic of familial junk.*

*But that wasn't the end of it, not at all.*

"Help me with these bloody cows, you mongrel," Rawlinson was saying, his voice cutting above the bellowing and the still-present squealing like a badly-oiled chain-saw. "We've lost a few, but if we can get some of the others back aboard we might be looking at a bonus."

Muller sauntered toward the train's rear. "I had to erase the transient," he said, patting the bulge in his shirt pocket. "You were right about him."

"Didn't have the balls for the job," Rawlinson said. "Funny thing is, fewer of 'em do these days. They say it's the speed of the new architectures. Makes a little job go a long, long way. Did you get the replacement tranny from the plane?"

"I thought I'd let you show me the installation procedure."

"Nothing to it. Just slot 'em in and give the introductory pep-talk. They already know the basics by the time we get 'em." But then the man trailed off, and his gaze was sweeping the horizon off to one side of the Oodnadatta trail. "What the hell are those lights?"

"Vehicles, I suspect," Muller said, but so quietly that Rawlinson didn't hear him.

In any case he didn't have long to wait. For a moment the cars were just indistinct dark shapes somewhere beyond the closest fringe of mulga trees, and then they erupted forward, engines surging, mercury lights scything the air, casting bright ellipses along the slatted side of the train.

"It's them," Rawlinson said.

"Them?" Muller said, feigning ignorance.

"Sons of bloody Namatjira. I told you they've been raiding Cadman's trucks." Rawlinson threw down the cattle prod, seemingly giving up on the task of rounding up the remaining loose animals. It would have been futile in any case: most of the cows which were capable of moving had bolted in terror into the night at the first sign of the cars, and the others were either dead or dying; those which had been crushed in the first stampede; dark shapes around the broken trailer like so many beached whales. But, thought Muller, did beached whales squeal like that? Did beached whales cry? Rawl-



inson had said the cows were ready to calf... but could even calves explain that awful threnody?

He didn't have time to worry about it. The vehicles belonging to the Sons of Namatjira had formed a circular corral around the road train, prowling in low gear. Most of the cars were pick-ups; four by fours prognate with roo-bars.

Rawlinson had reached the plane. He opened the side hatch and reached deep into it, emerging with something that Muller at first took for a crowbar. But it wasn't.

Rawlinson hefted the rifle, slipped a round into the chamber and fired it into the sky.

"I'm not sure that's legal," Muller said, while the circling vehicles slowed to a halt.

"So sue me, Paco."

"In any case, I'm not sure the Sons are greatly impressed."

He was right. Things were moving now, although the combination of gloom and glare made it hard to tell precisely what. Figures, certainly – dressed in fatigues and balaclavas. Muller caught the occasional glint of pale flesh. Although the Sons were nominally an Aboriginal terrorist group, he'd heard that they'd recruited numerous specialists and observers from other paramilitary organizations around the world, and in the melange of voices which carried across the night he heard accents of German, Israeli, Dutch...

But the Sons came no closer, and they were too far away for Rawlinson's elephant stopper. Instead, darker, sleeker shapes emerged from the corral, loping across the ground, or, Muller realized, not so much loping as bounding, springing. He knew what these animals were. It was what he had seen the goanna feasting on when the plane landed. Marsupials. Kangaroos, specifically.

Or what once had been kangaroos.

Each of the hapless animals had been converted by the Sons' rogue bio-engineers into cybernetically-enhanced terrorist devices. Muller had heard about these creatures in Perth; how they were called *mangaroos* because the rogue bio-engineers tended to be nervy Japanese kids who'd read too many comic books. It was, of course, an awful long way from the simple nervous system of a roach to the intricate, messy mind of a marsupial...but then again, the bio-engineers hadn't had to worry about funding or ethics committees. It was garden-shed cybernetics.

Each mangaroo wore night-vision goggles, its limbs and chest cased in sheets of articulated kevlar. Fibre-optic cables erupted from the back of each mangaroo's head and vanished into a matt-black control backpack. Most of the animals carried a specially-modified machine-pistol, buckled around one forelimb. The other arm – or in some cases both arms – ended in curved carbon-steel scythes. Some of the mangaroos even had missiles or the long gunmetal tubes of grenade-throwers projecting over their backpacks.

And they were bouncing closer.

*"You want the good news or the bad news?" said Leitner. "Well, okay, let me tell you. The good news is we can get you back into a body again. The bad news is, someone has to pay for it."*

*The conversation they were having was happening much faster than realtime now. Computational speed*

*had increased to the point where Sapphire's neural processes could be simulated more rapidly than those of a flesh-and-blood brain. Did this mean that certain details were being skimmed? She didn't know; no one was prepared to tell her, and after a while it had stopped being of any great concern.. After all, wasn't this what everyone actually wanted?*

*"Just so long as it isn't the one you thawed already," Sapphire said. "And that goes for the head as well. That's one model I'm trading in."*

*"You probably know about cloning," Leitner said. "Bit of a taboo subject these last few decades, even though the basic principles of mammalian cloning were established last century. But what with the recent upheavals..."*

*"You're saying you can grow a new body from my old cells, is that it?"*

*"Half the trick, yes – and probably the easiest half, actually." Leitner sounded convincing, but it was really a simulation of Leitner, synchronized to match Sapphire's computational rate. "What's harder is putting you back in – your neural patterns. Very tricky procedure – and very expensive too. Only slightly less costly than rebuilding your old body cell by cell."*

*"So why not do it that way, if the expense isn't so different?"*

*"Because it wouldn't be you, would it? Not unless we found a way of putting back all the memories you've accrued since we consolidated you. And if we're going to go to that trouble, we might as well begin with a blank canvas."*

*She could see the logic – almost. "You're saying I've got to wait until you've grown an adult body? Leitner, have you any idea how slowly time passes here?"*

*"Actually," he said, "that isn't quite the problem you think. We can grow an adult body in months now – provided you're willing to pay for it, of course."*

The mangaroos never used the worst of their weapons. Even the rifles they used with discretion, peppering the last of the trailers, the one which the fats had already vacated. They put a few holes in the tug, but not enough to do serious damage – and they were careful not to get too close. Muller remembered what Rawlinson had said about the road trains being able to defend themselves. The defensive systems had been neutralized by the plane, and that was why the Sons had been able to get as close as they had. But evidently – at the back of their minds – was the fear that the defensive systems would come back on-line, triggered by some automatic cut-in they had never anticipated.

Of course, Rawlinson wasn't saying much at all at the moment. What he was doing was lying by the road side, moaning and pawing at his thigh.

"I told you shooting at them wasn't a good idea," Muller said, inspecting the wound. "Did you expect you could take out enough of them before one of them got you?"

Rawlinson stopped moaning for a moment, like a radio being tuned off-channel. "Who the hell are you, Paco?"

"Exactly who I said I am. A Chilean who arrived in Perth."

Muller paused, knelt down and picked up something from the ground – something long and metallic. For a moment he only held it, half aware out of the corner of his eye of the nearing Sons, who were advancing behind

their animal accomplices.

"You're in with these bastards," Rawlinson said. "You're in with the bloody Sons, aren't you?"

"Not really," Muller said, still holding the cattle prod. "They contacted me in Perth, asked if I might assist them in a modest way, and for that they'd find me a good job on the west coast – something more suited to my skills than working on these wrecks."

Now another voice rang out, female, amplified.

"His involvement with us was really very limited, you know. We wouldn't want to overstate it." And the Son who was speaking paused to rip off her balaclava. She was black, with high, regal cheekbones catching the moonlight. Her accent, now that Muller paid proper attention to it, was French, although it was very slight. "Which isn't to say that we aren't grateful."

"You rigged this breakdown," Rawlinson said.

"My, aren't you quick. How else were we expected to get close to one of your vehicles, unless you kindly disengaged the defence systems for us?"

Rawlinson said: "One more time, Paco – how much did you know?"

"Less than you think," the woman said. "We arranged that Muller would arrive at the roadhouse not long before the next special train was due to start for Adelaide. When we arranged a breakdown, Muller was guaranteed to be on the repair team."

"You arranged a breakdown?"

"One of our specialists hacked into your train and had a chat with Mr Dubois," the woman said.

"The tranny."

Muller reached into his shirt pocket and tossed the woman the module. "I promised him you wouldn't erase him."

"We won't," she said. "Though not being erased is the best we can offer him." Then she said: "Dubois was helpful, of course. In his state of mind he was rather open to suggestion. And he had a grudge of his own he wanted settling, which we said we'd be able to help him with."

This was news to Muller. "A grudge?"

"Concerning a woman called Sapphire. It was all rather tawdry – and he wasn't making a great deal of sense – but it seems that this Sapphire woman rather spoilt his exit from the living – upstaged his farewell party, I believe. He's been brooding on that ever since; especially after he learnt she was in the same predicament as him." The black woman shook her head, as if none of this made any sense to her but she was only relating it for everyone else's benefit. "So we asked our hacker to arrange for Sapphire to end up working the same miserable contract as Mr Dubois. He didn't have the heart to suggest something worse, but neither could he bear the thought of her getting off lightly." Now she smiled; the whiteness of her teeth sudden in the darkness. "So it's all worked out splendidly. All that remained then was for Muller to arrange a distraction to mask our approach, and give us the word."

"I didn't even have to arrange one," Muller said. "You did that perfectly well yourself, Rawlinson. Incidentally, I think you'll live – the bullet only grazed you – it looks worse than it is. At least I think it does."

"Up yours, Paco."

The woman turned to one of the other Sons. "Get it bandaged, then load this gentleman into the rear

trailer. He'll get all the attention he needs when he arrives in Adelaide – if he lasts that long, of course."

Rawlinson seemed to take that as a cue to start moaning again, but it sounded false, like the tantrum of a demonstrative child. Muller toyed with the cattle-prod and, for a moment, considered touching the electrified end against his partner. He had seen the effectiveness of the prod against the escaped fats, and – while his knowledge of bovine physiology was limited – he was prepared to believe that cowskin was possibly less thin than the organ enveloping Rawlinson. He wondered what kind of squeal the man would emit; if in fact he was able to emit any sound at all.

And then Muller remembered the other squealing; the noise he had heard when the first few animals had spilled from the trailer and been trampled by those following them.

"What is that?" he said, addressing everyone present simultaneously. "That noise, like crying?"

*So they told her how it worked.*

*Economics, that was it. The one aspect of the world which hadn't changed at all. Nothing came for free, most especially not the afterlife.*

*Cloning her body and growing it to adulthood wasn't going to be especially expensive, Leitner said. Only a few years ago it would have been, because even when all the genetic manipulation was done, you still had to pay someone to be a surrogate mother, and the prices for that had gone through the roof. Artificial wombs had been tried with only moderate success; since it was incredibly hard to even approximate the biochemical environment of a living womb. The question of bringing clones to term in other clones was an ethical minefield, which really left only one option.*

"My God," said the black woman. "You don't know what any of this is about, do you?" There was no mockery in her voice, only astonishment. "You actually don't know what this consignment is, do you?"

"I'm afraid I don't," Muller said.

She turned to one of her sidekicks and had him walk back to one of the pick-ups and return with two dark shapes hanging from his hands. Muller saw what they were as he came closer, into the pool of light around the road train. He was carrying jerry-cans.

The woman took one of the cans for herself, then passed the other to Muller. "I'll show you, if you like. But you won't like it, I think."

He hefted the jerry-can. "What's this for?"

"You'll see."

*The one remaining option, Leitner said, disturbed some people. But look on the bright side. It was cheap. And that meant the only large expense in the whole process was wiring her neural patterns back into the clone's brain.*

*"Now, obviously," Leitner said. "Someone has to pay for it. And the logical someone is the person who's going to benefit from it in the first place."*

*Sapphire thought she was catching on fast now; getting the hang of the future. "Let me guess. You bring me back to life and then it's like, my ass is yours, until I pay back the costs?"*

*"Well," Leitner said. "You've got the gist of it right.*



*Just not the timing."*

And then he told her what they called people like her – people who existed only as neural recordings running on some computer somewhere; people who weren't, by any legal definition, actually people at all, although they had the potential to become so at some point in the future, if they wished. How they were called transients, and how, around the world, at any one time, thousands of transients were actually working, doing the jobs considered too messy for cheap software and too shitty for the living; slowly accruing the credits they needed to pay off their future return to humanity....

Perhaps it was the stench of diesel that did it, or the red stain on his fingers from the dyed liquid, which managed to look exactly like blood, or the smell he hoped the stench of diesel would mask, but which still lingered in the air. Perhaps it was all of these things, or perhaps it was the look he had seen on Blaine Dubois's face; the look of a man whose soul had been slowly eviscerated.

Or perhaps it was what he had seen in the dirt, at the rear of the road-train, where the last trailer had broken open.

The black woman had never introduced herself as they walked along the length of the train, but she had gone some way toward preparing him for what they were about to see. It was, she said, the real reason why they had stopped this train. Not because of the land rights – that was a lost cause now, and in any case it wasn't her fight. No; what they had stopped the train for was the cattle. Because of what the cattle were carrying.

"Rawlinson said they were pregnant," Muller said. "He said that was why the train was carrying them to Adelaide. But I didn't understand the significance."

"Cloning," the woman said. "That's Cadman's part in the big operation. Growing the bodies that the transients need to return to, when they've paid their dues."

And then she showed him what she meant, and Muller finally placed the squealing noise had heard. The noise that was so much like human crying. So much so, in fact, there was very little else it could be.

The cows had been ready to calf, Rawlinson had said. But not quite. And those that had died had ruptured; splitting open to reveal burdens they had never been meant to carry. Burdens which shifted and squirmed, until the closest one, the one that was squealing the loudest, turned its not-quite formed adult face toward Muller and opened its pale eyes in a scream of apprehension.

The woman shot them with a tiny pistol Muller had not noticed her carrying, and when the squealing was over they unscrewed the jerry-cans and emptied them.

*The deal was simple.*

The Singaporean company that owned the biotechnical patents which would restore Sapphire to life had many subsidiaries. One of these was a firm called Cadman who used transients to drive their road-trains. In some way which Leitner didn't go into, this operation was integral to the whole process of bringing the transients back to life – but that wasn't important; she could just as easily have ended up operating a sewer-inspection drone or one of the machines which scraped barnacles off the bottom of oil-tankers. To pay off her costs, Sapphire would have to drive one of Cadman's trains

for a year. She'd spend 20 hours a day doing this – transients didn't need sleep – but for the remaining time she would have access to all the world's data nets; all the simulated experiences she could desire.

There, now, it didn't seem so bad, did it?

Finally, when the terms of the deal had been made absolutely clear to her, Sapphire agreed to it. And there followed a strange period of limbo, in which she was disconnected from all input and her rate of computation slowed to a crawl.

And then she woke up in the desert somewhere, at night. Except she wasn't really there; just observing, and this guy who looked and sounded South American was politely running over things again; telling her how she was taking over this particular consignment because the last transient had flipped, or something. And she'd laughed at that, because while a year was a long time to do something, it wasn't so long, was it?

While behind this guy, she saw lots of dark, faceless people milling around, carrying what looked like guns and talking in an edgy melange of different languages, none of which she could begin to place. And in the foreground, the weirdest kangaroos she had ever seen.

Welcome to the future, Sapphire thought.

**Alastair Reynolds**, a Welshman working as a scientist in the Netherlands, has written several popular stories for *Interzone*, the most recent of which were "Byrd Land Six" (issue 96), "Spirey and the Queen" (issue 108) and "A Spy in Europa" (issue 120). Recently, he has finished his first novel.

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# *Return to the* **Nightmare Country**

*Stephen Gallagher*

*interviewed by*

*David Mathew*

When Stephen Gallagher published his novel *Oktober* in 1987 it was to be his temporary farewell to genre fiction, at least as far as his readers were concerned. Never a writer to remain in one place for very long, Gallagher used the early part of his full-time career to examine supernatural horror (*Valley of Lights*), Northern European legends (*Follower*), dystopic science fiction (the novelization of his own radio serial, *The Last Rose of Summer*), and techno-horror (*Chimera*). *Oktober* appeared, and here was Gallagher's murkiest and probably most ambitious novel at that juncture. A Kafka-esque tale of a man literally in the wrong place at the wrong time, *Oktober* is a tale of chemical malpractice on a continental scale, dealing as it does with a drug which unleashes the collective subconscious. The unfortunate protagonist

is experimented on and afterwards persecuted, not least in the hallucinogenic scenes in the Nightmare Country. The book went on to out-sell even the successful *Valley of Lights*. But Stephen Gallagher was not resting on his laurels. He published mainstream thrillers for a while, although some of the material he presented during this time had been written earlier.

Now, a decade on, Gallagher has returned to genre fiction in that he is currently directing *Oktober* for the small screen: three one-hour episodes for ITV which are now being filmed. I asked him how it felt to be back. There was no hesitation whatever: "I've never really felt as if I've been away. I know the most recent books that I've done have been classified as non-genre books, but during all that time I've still been working to get stuff like this off the ground. So it's

not a return as much as I'm emphasizing this side of the portfolio."

Given that film-making one's own book is a chance to re-evaluate old material, I wondered what new strengths his screenplay had brought to *Oktober*. "The script is in spirit quite close to the novel, although in detail I've been able to expand upon it in quite a few ways. Bear in mind, it's a long time since I wrote the novel. I first started working on the idea in 1983. The reason I know that is, it's the book I wrote before *The Boat House*, and I wrote *The Boat House* in 1984 because that's the year I got hepatitis in Leningrad. *Oktober* came out in 1987 and was picked up by a producer and optioned in the late '80s. It lay quiet for four or five years. But when I finally came back to it, I took the approach that I always take with adaptations, which is: I've done the book; I don't want to transcribe the



book, or repeat the book. Let's have some fun on the screen."

Many writers want to be directors on the sly, and some even become successful directors. I wondered where Stephen's interest in film had come from and where he had learned to direct. He said, "I'm learning it still. I did come equipped with a number of the basics, because I've always been a film fan, since I was a kid. I had a Standard 8 camera as soon as I could afford one, and as soon as I could afford to I junked it and got a Super 8 camera. Even now I've got my 16mm in a cupboard at home, although next to the machinery we've got on set it's something of an inferior toy. Film-making is something that's always been dear to me, and in a sense something I've always done. When I was five I made my first projector out of a shoebox with a torch inside it. I drew my own films on pieces of polythene and projected them on the living room wall. So there's nothing I'm doing now that isn't an extension of what I was doing then..."

"I've mugged up a lot on theory; I've played around; I've worked in cutting rooms. It still doesn't prepare you entirely for the huge amount of technical responsibility that you have on the set. But what I have to say is that I have an extremely good crew who support me and guide me in all that. The procedure on the floor tends to be: I go in with a very clear idea of what I want to achieve at the end but no absolutely set way of getting there. In discussion with the director of photography, the cameraman and the first assistant director, we work out how to achieve what we need to – and then I step back. Then there's this marvellous spectacle of all these people absolutely flogging their sodding guts out to make it come right! You set these things in motion and then you wait for it all to come together."

Stephen Gallagher is a confident and calm presence on set, and he has clearly earned the respect of the people with whom he is working. He does not need to raise his voice and the professionals around him seem happy in their tasks. When I asked him if he based his film-making style on any director, living or dead, he told me: "I'm just trying to tell the story. We'll see at the end of the day if I have a film-making style or not."

In the past, Gallagher attempted to raise other film adaptations of his own work off the ground, to varying degrees of success. *Oktober* is the first of his novels to be transferred to the screen. What did he think this particular project had which the others might not have had? Why had *Oktober* been successful?

"It's a meshing of the wheels of the mechanism of the universe! They come together or they don't. Most of

the time they don't, and then occasionally they do. And when they do I have no explanation as to why they do. I have the same bag of tricks that I'm constantly putting on offer. Then every now and then I'll meet the right combination of people at the right point in history where my little bag of tricks fits in nicely. It can be something as ridiculous as it was with (the TV adaptation of) *Chimera*. What started that off was that a TV company had negotiated a slot for a drama and its co-production partner pulled out, and they suddenly needed a four-hour drama. My script was more or less ready to shoot, so they



Above: Stephen Tompkinson in *Oktober*  
(photo courtesy Channel 5 Broadcasting Limited)

said, 'if we give you a cheque for this can you do what needs to be done?' It was as silly as that. It goes to prove there's no way you can hustle and rig and make things happen. You just have to be true to your own ideas, and be consistent in your application so that when the opportunity comes you are 100% ready."

What plans for the future does Gallagher have? At the end of 1996 he was in discussions with his publishers, who at the time were not content with the fact that he had characters in his new manuscript, *The Painted*

*Bride*, who had been in some of his earlier books for other publishers. This would seem to be an enjoyable method of cross-fertilization within one's own *oeuvre* (and one that Robert Heinlein, among others, used often) but I wondered if the situation had been resolved. "Resolved in the sense that I had to put the whole caboodle on one side to concentrate on this anyway. I have a book that's lined up and ready to go as soon as this film is finished, which is going to take me over to North Carolina. So my intention is to press on with that one and return to *The Painted Bride* at a later date."

What, then, is the next book project? "The working title is *The Spirit Box*, and that will probably be the finished title. It's been through several titles and that's the one that's stuck. It's about an English guy who's coming to the end of a contract in a research role in North Carolina. He's working for an extremely high-powered, hi-tech company and his family's been over there with him. Now it's the last day of his contract, his wife has returned to England ahead of him – so it's just him and his teenaged daughter. They're clearing out the house, and just as he's hearing the phone line being disconnected he looks up the stairs, and his daughter is standing at the top. And she says, 'Daddy, I've done something stupid.' And what's she's done is take every pill in the bathroom cabinet; and this simple but very real and possible incident sets in motion a chain of events and a personal odyssey for him that takes him right up to the edge of accepted normal reality so that he peeps over into the abyss."

Gallagher has an inquisitive, self-analytical mind, and he was quick to dive into explanations about this work in progress: "Although it's a realistic contemporary thriller in the way that *Red, Red Robin* was, it does venture into *Oktober* territory. So you could say the book is a synthesis of the two styles I've employed in the past. Never consciously employing them as two different styles, you understand." At what stage is the novel? "It's synopsisized, it's partly researched: I've got my research contacts lined up over there to go and meet. And I've had to put that all aside because I'm on an exclusive contract, which means I can't work on anything else but this film."

Apart from novels, of course, the author is well known for his shorter fiction. His short stories pack a strong emotional punch. I was among a crowd that saw him read "Homebodies" to an audience in 1991. There was the atmosphere of a held breath, and although it might be a cliché to say it, you really could have heard a pin drop. Does he still write short stories? "I haven't written any since





Once upon a time there was a Princess who lived in a palace on a mountain. The mountain was like a tall blue wave that had turned to marble in the air. The palace glittered on it like a golden diadem by day, and at night the stars filled its windows. Gardens of peacocks and hyacinths surrounded the palace, and fountains tumbled like silver silks to the valleys below. From these facts alone, one sees it was a wonderful place. One guesses at once how ordered, beautiful, secure and pleasant was the life of the Princess. Besides, she was in perfect health, her father the King, and her mother the Queen loved and were unstintingly proud of her, and she was betrothed to a Prince of outstanding handsomeness, talent and virtue.

Then a morning came, like any other morning, with the gold and silver light pouring through the crystal windows. The Princess woke up and got at once out of bed, just as she always did, since she had always slept marvellously well and could not wait to start the new day.

She looked first at her slim white feet as they met the summer tiles, and next at her slender ankles. She held out her slim white clever hands, with their exactly oval nails. And shaking her head, she absently noted her mane of satin hair, which was tinted the colour of the palest tangerine. But then, crossing the room, the Princess saw into her mirror, and she stopped quite still. For the mirror had changed. That is to say, the mirror was just the same, pure glass in an artistic wreath of platinum, and held within it the room was gleaming, and the Princess gleamed at the room's centre. But the face of the Princess was no longer her own. "Who is that?" said the Princess, bewildered.

No one answered, not even the mirror, although now and then, in those parts, mirrors had been known to talk.

The Princess went slowly closer. She leaned forward and gazed in, holding back her hair with her hands.

There was nothing wrong with the face. It had two eyes, a nose, a forehead, cheeks and chin, and lips. It was even a well-made face, a *lovely* face – but it was not the face the Princess had lain down in, not the face of the Princess. Not at all.

The Princess whirled away. She counted to one hundred then turned back.

And there it was again, the face of a stranger, perched up on the white tower of her neck, amid her tangerine hair.

The King and Queen, who were breakfasting on the white stone terrace 90 feet long, glanced up smiling to greet the Princess. Their smiles turned to sunny stone, like that of the terrace.

"Did you sleep well, my dear?" asked the Queen, a superfluous but friendly question, which was generally applied to guests. "Oh yes, thank you," replied the Princess, cautiously.

Her father turned from her, and pointed out instead a brilliantly coloured bird in a magnolia tree.

Presently the Queen went in to see her jeweller, and the king rose to go about his important affairs.

The Princess sat idly, with crossed ankles, scattering crumbs for the sparrows.

A little before noon, her betrothed, the handsome Prince, was seen riding through the gardens. Noticing the Princess in the distance on the walk, the sun gleam-

# The Girl Who Lost Her Looks

Tanith Lee

ing on her tangerine hair, he set his horse into a canter, then, reining in, looked at her askance. "Oh, excuse me. I thought you were the Princess."

"I am," said the Princess.

"Yes, of course," said the Prince, "I didn't mean to imply lack of royalty. I simply meant, not *my* Princess."

The Princess moved beside the Prince's horse as he guided it on along the lime tree avenue.

"Tell me about your Princess," said the Princess. "How long have you known her?"

"Several years in fact. Since we were only twelve."

"Seven years, then," said the Princess.

"Yes. The magic number seven. This summer we are to be married."

The Princess thought. She said, "And shall I tell you about myself?"

"Please don't trouble," said the Prince. "I shouldn't like to tire you."

The Princess said, "I've heard that you can hit a target at 500 paces, and that you can paint a picture in oils while galloping up and down full tilt on your horse."

"Just so," said the Prince. "It's nothing."

"And you must love the Princess very much."

"We were made for each other."

"By whom?" asked the Princess.

The Prince blinked. Then he cleared his throat and sang, in an eloquent baritone, a popular song.

The Princess dropped behind at the steps to the terrace, where the Prince dismounted, and, departing, wished her a lovely day.

The brilliant bird from the magnolia tree was sitting preening in a bush.

"What shall I do?" asked the Princess.

"Don't cry," said the bird, "pain needs no rain."

"Why has this happened to me?" asked the Princess.

"Listen," said the bird, "once you were a child, and in many decades you will be an old woman. Things happen."

"You don't help me."

"Did I say I would?"

The Princess went back to the palace and walked through her rooms. She covered her mirrors with shawls. Then she took out her favourite dresses, and a long string of pearls that had been her grandmother's, and some emeralds that had been her aunt's, and a pair of gloves her betrothed had given her stitched with roses. She looked at her books and at her painting materials, and at her spinet, tuned exactly for her light quick hands. She watered the flowers in pots of alabaster for the last time.

About three o'clock, the Prince was teaching a new card game he had invented, to the King. It had often seemed to the Princess her father liked the Prince even more than she did. The Queen was directing gardeners in her summerhouse of exotics. Everything went on in its serene-and-always fashion. And the Princess went down the palace stair, and down through the gardens – where only a kitchen maid saw her, and seemed afraid. But the Princess was not used to speaking to kitchen maids. Going out of the gates, where the sentries did not recognize her, the Princess took the road beside one of the silver fountains, and descended to the valleys below.

In the valleys were examples of jolly peasant life. Only happy and hearty peasants were allowed to live so near the mountain palace. If they grew melancholy or fell sick, they were taken away to be cared for somewhere much more distant. Pink-cheeked girls tended the vines, brawny farmers worked the ploughs, which were drawn by glossy oxen. Herd boys piped evocative melodies. The sheep looked recently washed. Even the deer, which were regularly hunted for the King's table, moved calmly, burnished as nuts in the chestnut woods.

By sunset, however, the valleys were crossed, for the Princess was fit and had walked fast. As the sun sank like the ripest cherry, turning all the leaves and grasses reddish gold, she saw a blot of darkness that lay only a mile or so ahead. It was a great forest, dark and closed by the doors of approaching night.

The Princess sat on a warm mossy boulder. She had

eaten fruit from the valleys, and drunk water from their streams. She was not hungry, but felt that tiredness which makes one restless. As the last juice of the red sun dripped away, she got up and walked on, and so straight into the dark forest.

Owls cried in the trees. Shafts of moonlight pierced as if through vaulted openings of midnight churches, and showed badgers playing and fighting in the undergrowth.

The Princess, for now it was late, paused in a glade, and watched these black and white creatures. Each of their masks looked very like the others.

She said to them, "Do you see, this isn't my own face. I don't know if mine was stolen from me, or if it simply escaped out of a window."

One of the badgers, a huge tusked male, stood up and stared at her. "You humans have no faces," he said. "What you say, therefore, makes no sense."

But when the badgers had gone, an owl alighted on the tree above and folded its white wings. Its eyes were suitably the fractured gold of church windows set into the wood.

"I have no one to turn to," said the Princess.

"Nor have any," said the owl. "Turn to yourself."

"But which way?"

"If you wish to be sad," said the owl, "walk in a direction that seems sad to you. If you wish to be in danger then proceed in a dangerous way."

"Neither of these," said the Princess. "I only want to find myself."

"Then walk," said the owl, "in a direction that looks to you, like you. It's simple, you see."

But then it called in its own savage shrill tongue, and soared up to the moon.

The Princess slept an hour, and when she woke the sun was rising. The forest was lit with green, and a path ran through it made of small pale orange flowers. "Perhaps the owl lied," said the Princess. But she had never heard that they did. So she followed the path.

She followed it all day, eating now and then wild apples and grapes that flourished early in among the trees. In the afternoon, the forest opened like a curtain, and she saw before her a dry and rocky wasteland. Nothing grew on it except a ruined tower, which was quite near. As she went on, a man came out of the doorway. He was tall and strong, but he had the face of a dog. That is, he looked as a dog looks which has been kept wanting things that would have been good for it, and trained to be vicious.

"If you pass through this waste," he said, "you must pay me a toll. Who are you?"

"I am a Princess," replied the Princess truthfully.

"Excellent. Then you can pay a Princess's toll." He took her arm and led her into the tower. It was a gloomy place, dirty, with an old grey smell. The dog-man indicated a bed. "Lie down. It will soon be done with."

The Princess said, "Excuse me please. I was joking. I'm not a Princess at all – I am – a washerwoman."

"Then you can pay a washerwoman's toll. Lie down on the bed. It won't take long."

The Princess said, "All the tolls are the same, then?"

"To me," said the man. "Not necessarily to those that pay them."

The Princess went to the bed and lay down. The man came bounding and jumped, dog-like, on top of her. As



he took the toll she gazed up at the roof-beam, where a black raven sat .

"Pain needs no rain," said the Princess to the raven.

"Flowers do," said the raven. From its eyes fell two bright tears and dropped on the Princess's cheeks, gentle as dew. "I have cried *for* you, this time," said the raven.

The man had finished taking the toll, so the Princess got up and shook out her skirts. She was surprised to hear now it was the man who wept into the pillows. "None of them are the one I want," he wept.

The raven accompanied the Princess from the tower.

"How shall I bear it?" said the Princess.

"You mustn't try to bear it," said the raven. "Cast it away on the wind. Let the wind bear it, like a bird."

"But it was done to me," said the Princess.

"Would you rather keep the hurt with you, to carry? It's very heavy. Throw it away. Or I'll wrap up its memory for you in black paper, and you can strap it round your neck, and always look at it and feel the weight. Throw it away on the wind."

Just then the wind blew across the waste and the Princess threw the price of the toll she had had to pay on to the wind. The toll-price became another black raven. The wind bore it up. It sailed off over the waste.

"Whose hurt then are *you*?" the Princess asked the other raven.

"His," said the raven, "the toll-taker. I sit on the roof-beam over his head. At night I tear his liver."

The Princess rushed from the tower. She sped all day and all night, and the stars broke through the sky like the windows of all the palaces set on mountains, and pain needing no rain ran with her and within her. But as the dawn came again she saw a town lying below, white and sparkling, as if a cup of sugar had been spilled beside a river's clean silver spoon.

The town was sweet as sugar and icing and honeycomb. One might break small pieces off the sides of buildings and nibble them for sustenance. And the sunlight poured down like golden molasses and strawberry wine.

Soon the Princess came to a market place.

Lions were dancing to an orchestra and parrots told fortunes. A feast was laid out on tables for any to help themselves, but the Princess began to see that the payment for this was to be kicked or spat on or slapped by a line of big men and women in red aprons. A fountain splashed into a sugar-stone bowl, and nearby was a booth with a banner planted before it, and on the banner were painted these words: *Lost Looks Refound. Or Improved.*

The Princess went close. A woman was standing in the booth, crying. She said she had grown old, which was true. From a box they brought her a sealed vase, and when she uncorked it, rays of light spread up into her face. The woman laughed with delight, and her face altered. It was still old, but now it was beautiful. She paid with a silver coin, and came out with a lilting step. Seeing the Princess hesitating the woman said, "Don't wait, dear. Go in. They know what they're about."

Even while she said this, a boy pushed by and went to the people in the booth. He had a scar down his face, a terrible scar, ridged black and purple. One of the shadowy figures brought him a dagger, and put it against his cheek. The scar metamorphosed. It had become the dagger. When one looked in his face now,

one saw at once he had been wounded honourably. He strode from the booth, proudly, his head held high. And he had paid with a new-laid egg.

The Princess stole into the booth. She tried to make out who the people were, but they seemed like reflections in unstill water.

"One morning," said the Princess, "I glanced in my mirror, and my face was no longer my own."

A dove sitting on the counter said, "Throw your mirror away." And a lark on a swing called down, "See yourself in another's eyes."

"That won't do," said the Princess. "In the eyes of others I became no one. I've been rejected and forgotten, I've been abused. I've walked for miles and look, the soles of my feet are worn through. But it's my face I want back."

Then one of the shadows came up, and the Princess saw this was truly an old, old woman, and *she* seemed to have no face left, only rags, but her eyes were soft, as if they shone in a mist.

"Go to the Tavern of the White Pillar. Your face is to be seen there."

"What price do you ask?" said the Princess, dubiously, "What do you have?"

"Nothing," said the Princess. "I left home in a hurry."

The old, old woman whispered to herself. Others of her kind came up. They were also ancient, with ragged rag faces, eyes of mercury in fog. Surrounded, the Princess clenched her fists.

The hag said, "Pay nothing now, then. You will owe us."

"I'd so much rather not."

But the Princess found herself out on the street and looking up over the market, she saw an inn with blue pillars, and one huge white pillar, from which a flock of starlings were chipping off tiny gems of icing-sugar frosting.

Getting out of a carriage by the door was a girl in wild rich clothing, and necklaces of hammered gold. Her hair was the yellow of young apricots, and she had the Princess's face. There was no doubt in the mind of the Princess at all. The forehead and brows and eyes, the nose and cheeks and chin. The lips.

And with the Princess's lips the unknown Girl called loudly, and out of the tavern hurried a cupbearer, and she drank thirstily from the big glass cup, drank all the wine, then smashed the cup flamboyantly against the sugar pillar. With a dancer's step she flashed on into the inn. After her sprang a retinue sounding tambourines and bells, and a cry of greeting rose raucously from inside.

A parrot sat on the fountain's rim. It said, "Fear makes the spear. Bliss makes the kiss. But who will hear when I tell them this?"

"These riddles!" cried the Princess, and she meant to wrench at her hair in anger. But she found her hair was cropped short, only like a bristle of fur on her head. For the booth of Refound Looks had taken a sudden utter payment three minutes earlier, and she had never even noticed.

All the long day, the Princess sat in the Tavern of the White pillar, harried by inn servants who wanted her to buy a drink or a meal, and who threatened to throw her in the street. Finally she bought, with the border off her dress, a goblet of beer. But she only sipped it, and so they harried her again.

The Princess was intent upon the Girl with apricot

hair, who sat at her own table, eating and drinking, from a line of dishes and wines and fine liqueurs, coffees in amber cups and chocolate in blue porcelain.

All this time the musicians made music for her, loud, clashing songs. And the lions were brought in and danced for her, and then the chief lion shared her couch and she hung him with a lily garland and tickled his ears until he snarled.

Who was this Girl? Who could she be? She was untamed and incautious, greedy, arrogant, loud and full of energy. She tossed her head and sang and told jokes, some of which were actually very amusing. And once, when a man at a neighbouring table mocked her, she threw a knife that parted his hair.

Amber coffee day melted to the chocolate and blue porcelain of dusk.

Torches were lit outside, and in the inn the lamps burned fiercely high. The starlings had come in and twittered stickily on the rafters. They did not talk, which was a relief to the Princess.

But, "What shall I do?" she asked. And when no one attended or answered, she got up and went across the crowded room, and stood in front of the wild golden Girl.

"What do you want?" said the Girl, indifferently, and with no recognition either.

"You have on my face. Either you stole it by magic or bought it from thieves. You must give it back."

"Your face? *Yours*? What rubbish. This is mine, and besides, you have one of your own. If *that* one isn't yours, from whom did you steal *it*? You're the thief, not I."

Dumbfounded the Princess stood her ground, but two of the inn servants came up now and seized her. They put her out of the inn door and slammed it.

When the Princess beat on the door, someone emptied a pail of nightsoil on her cropped head.

She lived like a beggar in the town, scraping sugars off the walls with her nails, which were now long and uneven, drinking from the public fountain. She watched for the Wild Girl who had her face. The Wild Girl came and went in her carriage, always attended by her noisy retinue, drums, tambourines and shouts. Into booths and shops she passed, and about the parks, where enormous dogs put up their paws on her shoulders. She went to the inn of the pillar, emerging at midnight with harps, mandolines and howls. At last the Princess followed the Wild Girl to her home. She was enabled to do this because, on that night, the Wild Girl's carriage was pulled to her gate by some of her admirers, four strong men, and went quite slowly.

The house lay behind a high wall, and cinnamon trees hung over the wall. The Princess sat down at the wall's foot as the clamour of the Wild Girl's homecoming died away.

A monkey rustled in the boughs overhead. Thinking it a bird, the Princess refused to look up. In any case, the monkey said clearly, "Don't you have a question?"

The Princess did not speak.

The monkey said, "Do you know, once I was a king. I ruled a kingdom vast as a sea. Thirty armies were at my bidding. My crown was made of gold, rubies and chrysolites, so heavy I could never wear it, and a giant held it for me always over my head. But then I offended a witch, and now I'm as you see me, a monkey in a cinnamon tree."

"Why have you told me this?" asked the Princess.

"To alleviate your boredom. It was a lie."

"Did the owl lie? Did the raven lie?" asked the Princess. "That woman in there has my face."

"The face of a monkey is like a human face," said the monkey, "but *we* are more beautiful."

"How can I get into the woman's garden?" asked the Princess.

"Catch hold of this bough that I'll swing down to you."

And the monkey swung down the bough and the Princess caught hold of it. She was so slight now from her travelling and from living on nothing but sugar and water, that the bough sprang back with her and she was on the wall's top.

The monkey laughed, without showing its teeth. It darted away, and the Princess climbed down into the garden of her enemy, the Wild Girl.

It was a pretty garden, but quiet. Starlight dripped from the grass-blades, and on the paths the stones mirrored the moon. Across a lawn with one still pool, the house had no lighted windows, and not a sound was now to be heard.

Then a lamp bloomed in an upper window. The Princess saw the Wild Girl going to and fro, combing her long apricot hair.

A creeper grew on the wall. The Princess climbed up it. She stood on the balcony outside the Wild Girl's window.

First the Wild Girl plaited her hair, then she cast off her jewels and necklaces. Then she threw off her dress and put on a nightgown the colour of milk. And then – and *then* – turning to her mirror, and having undone some little glittering hooks, and spoken a magic word, she took off her face.

"Ah," said the Princess. She bowed her head.

In a tree a nightingale sang, "Pain needs no rain to grow. The heart is happier to beat more slow."

"Who's there?" said the Wild Girl, coming briskly to the window. She had a nice face without the other one, ordinary and appealing. The Princess shrank back, but the face saw her with its two mild eyes. "Oh, what a pest you are," sighed the Wild Girl. She worked the catch of her window. "Come in, then. Let's have it over with."

"You think," said the Wild Girl, now a Mild Girl, "I have your face."

"There it is," said the Princess, "on that stand."

But in the corner beyond the lamp, the removed face seemed now only like a drooping flower.

"Well," said the Mild Wild Girl, "go over and take a proper look."

So the Princess went and looked at the face. She looked a long time. Then the Girl stole up, and all at once she held before the Princess a shining mirror.

What did the Princess see? Certainly not the face she had woken with that morning in the palace, the face no one had known. This was another face again. It was spare and hungry, with wide sombre eyes. And the bristles of hair had grown out brown.

"I was born in a palace, but since then I've been rejected and abused," said the Princess, "and *shorn*. That has changed it, this face, to what you see."

"Some say," said the Wild Mild Girl, perhaps randomly, "that a man lives in a tower in a waste. Each day he puts on the face of a dog because he thinks dogs are unclean beasts and so too he thinks of himself."

"Yes," said the Princess. She shuddered.

Outside the nightingale sang, but now it sounded only like a nightingale.

"And is that face on the stand truly your face, then?" asked the Girl.

"I thought that it was."

"Then it must have been," said the Girl, "rather *like* that face which you wore in your palace. Of course, going out I put on a glamorous and gaudy face. It's my public face for the town. They expect it. They say, Oh, here she comes, that loud wild girl. I pet lions and throw knives. Only intimates ever see *this* face. And now you've seen it too. But my loud face you mistook for your former face because, I assume, your former face was also loud and proud and gaudy."

"Yes," said the Princess. "You're quite right. It was arrogant and brave. It gave orders, and played the spinet brilliantly and danced till dawn. Sometimes it took me riding, and I could outrace everyone but my betrothed. Even my betrothed, actually. But I never did – was that the face or... this other face? Was it tact – kindness – *fear*? But listen to me – that face was *mine*. I was – *used* to it."

"Nevertheless," said the Girl, "one night you took it off, possibly without even noticing. You must have been sick and tired of it."

"If I took it off, where did I lay it down?"

The Girl shrugged. "Or you hid it, perhaps?"

"It was mine – mine – mine!" cried the Princess.

"Tears are wet," sang the annoying nightingale, "but they dry. Never forget, they are made by the eye easy as pie."

The Girl opened the window and said severely, "Be quiet, or tomorrow *you* shall go in a pie." The nightingale flew off cackling like a goose. The Girl added, "They know I never eat nightingales."

The Princess rose. She said, "I must walk back all that long way. And look for my proper face."

The Mild Girl said nothing. She got into her bed and blew out the lamp.

In darkness, the Princess climbed from the balcony and down the creeper, and went carefully through the garden.

Over the town and the silver spoon river, the dawn was beginning like a rosehip sauce. The roofs were like Turkish Delight.

"They are too sweet here," said the Princess, as she trudged away.

The Princess walked and walked. She walked back through the horrible waste, and near twilight, although not the twilight of that first day, she saw the ruined tower. The man with the dog-like face was prowling round it, and the raven was sitting on his shoulder, peering down at the spot where the man's liver must be.

"If you pass through this waste, you must pay me a toll."

"I will," said the Princess, and she spat on him.

"That will do," said the man, "it's all I'm worth."

Later she came to the forest, and walked all night over the ferns and roots, but she saw no badgers and the owls were silent.

Eventually she reached the valleys under the mountain. She met a girl who was sobbing because her mother had died, but this girl quickly hid her tears, pretending they were jewellery she had bought and held against her cheeks. And there was a dead stag that had

been hunted. No one spoke to the Princess, instead generally they shooed her off. They shouted things into the air about beggars and scroungers, and escaped prisoners whose heads had been shaved.

The way up the mountain like a sea-wave of marble, was much harder than the path down, but after some time she reached the palace walls. She knew no one would ever let her in at the gate, so she wandered about until she found a hole that foxes had made. Through this she squeezed, being now very thin and having no long satiny pale tangerine hair to catch on anything.

Night fell from its colossal height, and by the hour the Princess reached the palace itself, all the starry lights were burning bright as tigers.

When she stood on the terrace, and looked into the ballroom, the Princess saw the chandeliers resembled suns, and the dancers whirled. Every so often, the men would raise the women high in their arms, and the women would toss their heads and clap their hands, their hair and their fingers netted by emeralds and pearls. And then the Princess saw the Prince, clothed in cloth-of-gold, and he was flaming with enthusiasm brighter than anything, and in his arms he raised high a girl with tangerine hair, dressed with diamonds, and clapping diamonded hands, and her face was the face which the Princess had lost. Truly, this time, it was.

"*She* is the thief, then," said the Princess. "And somehow she's grown my hair from her head, too."

Then she pressed herself to the window just as the darkness did, and no one saw her at all, as if she was only a shadow.

The Princess watched like one of the garden's peacocks, all eyes.

She saw that the Prince clearly thought he danced with the Princess, and drank wine with her, and on her finger he placed a new ring, richer than any of the others. And the King and Queen too gazed at their impostor daughter lovingly and approvingly. And the servants rushed to do her bidding. No one hesitated. They did not know they had been duped.

At last, the guests were hot, and the terrace doors were opened. The Princess, who had slipped aside behind a hyacinth tree, noted who came out, and in the end the dupe Princess did, arm in arm with the Prince.

Into the cool night gardens they went, billing and cooing and saying to each other witty things. The Princess stalked them to a glade, and here the Prince turned into a thicket to listen to a nightingale which sang, "Oh life will be the death of me."

While his back was turned, the Princess seized the impostor by her slender neck and choked her senseless.

"Is that you, my dear?" asked the Prince, not turning, for he always paid attention to nature, and was writing a clever book about it.

"Only a little cough," said the true Princess, pulling her own face free of her rival – and with it came the mane of tangerine hair. "Why, you're a kitchen maid," said the Princess.

"What *is* that, my love?" asked the Prince, irritated to now that she kept interrupting his study of the nightingale.

But the Princess put on the face she thought was hers by right, and the false hair so like her own tinted hair, and next the Princess-dress the kitchen maid had



worn to the ball, and all the diamonds. And when the Prince turned back to the Princess again, she said, "It is bliss makes the kiss."

And the Prince kissed her. It seemed he noticed no change at all. But then, obviously, he never had.

They went back to the ballroom and danced until dawn. After which, they put on fresh sumptuous garments, and rode in the parkland of the King's garden, and the King and Queen waved them off from the 90-foot terrace. The Prince shot three birds with a single arrow, while composing a song to the lute, and all this as they rode.

"How happy I am," thought the Princess, aloud. And when they galloped to the palace again, near dinner-time, and she glimpsed a kitchen maid sitting under a shrub with her throat all black and blue, the Princess smiled her own true regal smile, the smile of her own true face. "I am myself again."

But a thrush sang in a tree, "Oh life will be the death of me."

A few days passed, some nights. The Princess moved in the palace like a bird in a cage. One morning she came out and walked in the garden, for her feet, worn through by walking, were changed for ever, despite her face and hair and gown.

"How happy I am," said the Princess, to her changed feet. "To be as I was. To have what I had."

And distantly, hearing a kitchen maid crying, softly and hoarsely, the Princess thought, "Pain needs no rain."

But then the rain came anyway, and washed the garden over. The peacocks spread their optic tails, the hyacinths threw out their scent in a blue mist.

The Princess, who was alone and quite concealed, took off her Princess's face, and looked at it. In the rain it was only another scented, drooping flower.

"Who am I?" the Princess asked. No one answered. "Am I better here as this," she continued, "or out in the dangerous and uncertain, uncomfortable world of forests and wastes, ruins and sugars. Is this face better, or the other face underneath, that changes?" And no one spoke. The birds only sang their songs. The rain played a tune, but it had no words.

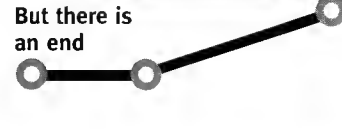
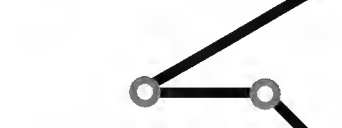
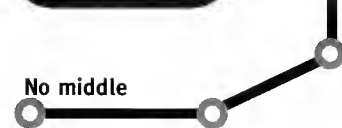
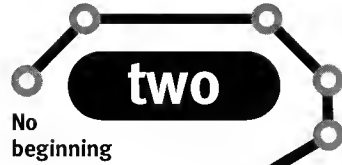
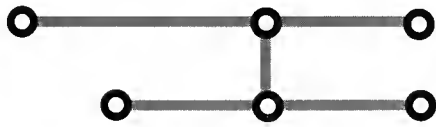
The Princess's feet shuffled. They wanted to go, to walk the world. The face stared haughtily up at her and she did not know it any more. She did not know herself at all.

Louder than the kitchen maid's crying and the music of the rain, she heard the clever handsome laughter of the Prince, inventing a new perfume in a silken chamber, to amuse them all.

"Shall I stay, or shall I go?" said the Princess. "I cannot say, I do not know."

And she sat still, almost faceless, in the falling rain, to puzzle it out.

**Tanith Lee** is one of Britain's most eminent writers of fantasy and gothic novels, and we are delighted to welcome her to *Interzone* for the first time. One speciality of hers is the writing of latter-day fairy tales for adults, and she has been represented in all the standard anthologies of that type of fiction in recent years (usually alongside such well-regarded fabulists as Angela Carter and Jane Yolen). A daughter of the actor Bernard Lee (who played "M" in the James Bond movies for many years), she lives with her husband on the Sussex coast.



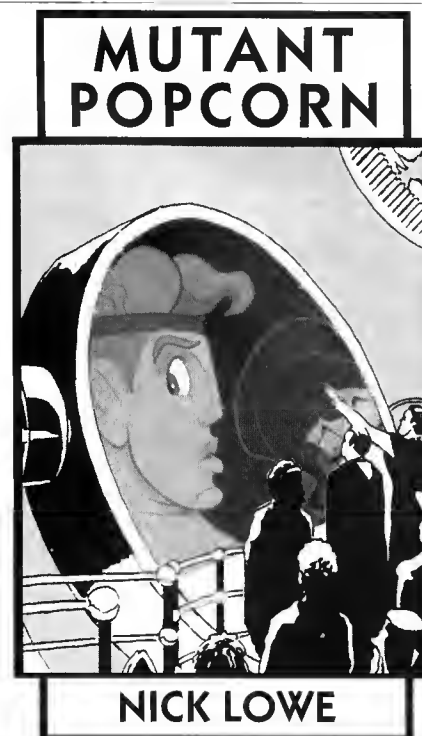
My daughter's first doll was a naked, degenitalated male abandoned on the street, the only clue to his identity – later confirmed by forensic research as Prince Eric from *The Little Mermaid* – the word DISNEY stamped on the back of his neck. She called him Man, which struck me as rather profound. "Man's leg fall off," she would observe, with a note of sorrow for us all.

These last times are certainly a new dawn for Disney, as befits an organization which positions itself increasingly as the first fully-secular world religion, with the canon of animated features its sacred texts. If you put your ear to the future, you can already hear the inspirational theme song of *Hercules* chirping out from school assemblies in the post-denominational multicultural that is part of our millennial Disney World. (Why, this is Disney World, nor are we out of it.) "I can beat the odds/I can go the distance/I don't care how far/I can be so strong..." Ask not what this stuff is doing to our young people's heads, or what kind of depressive baggage for later life is being deposited by this relentless assurance that nobody has limitations, that everyone is entitled to everything and capable of gratifying their most inflated fantasies. This is a call to faith, and to suffer the little children when the plate comes round.

Like any religious organization, Disney has a covenant with its constituents and a need to reach out to the masses. All Disney offerings since its own Renaissance have been anxious about their material, and painfully keen to avoid construable disparagement towards such powerfully plutopsephic interest-groups as women, Islam, native Americans, and the differently-shouldered. As such, though *Hercules* is New Disney's least embarrassed feature, it's still eager to reassure all those disenfranchised by the white imperialists' classical tradition that its subject matter is now free of any previous owners. The first players on the scene are the very, ahem, red-figure chorus of Muses, whose African-American narratorial frame reassures us that, whatever palefaced European elites may have done through the old millennia to appropriate Herc and his buddies for their own interests, today it's Black Athena who's ultimately whooping the tunes. And at least *Hercules*, unlike any other classical figure bar Cleopatra, can draw on a long and jolly postwar tradition in popular culture, ever since Joe Levine's 1958 vehicle splashed out an incredible \$1M on publicity to make Steve Reeves a star, a cheesy dubbed Italian beefcake movie an international blockbuster, and Cinecitta sword-and-sandal movies a picabudget production line that eventually killed off the Hollywood classical epic altogether.

And yet, *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit*. "Wouldya listen to him?" a choreutes complains of Charlton Heston's prologue. "He's makin' the story sound like some Greek tragedy!" But it's one of the delicious inexplicables of modern cinema that every film to come out of Hollywood is openly, systematically modelled on a standard template (diagrammed repeatedly in standard works like Syd Field's *Screenplay*) that derives directly, though in a weirdly-garbled form, from a 4th-century BC tutor on how to write Greek tragedies. As Francis X. Feighan, author of *The Screenwriter's Companion*, once memorably said on a *Moving Pictures*: "You get your character up in a tree, you throw rocks at him for a while, and then you get him down. And that's your basic three-act structure in the Aristotelian terms." It's just a shame that books III and up of Aristotle's *Poetics* – which dealt originally with explosion movies, screwball romances, John Grisham adaptations, relationship-oriented chickflix, and coming-of-age comedy vampire westerns – were all destroyed at the end of *The Name of the Rose II*, leaving only a few scattered fragments preserved in late glossographers to bear witness to the original screenwriting guru's seminal discussion of why pirate movies flop, and his startling messianic prophecy of the coming of Jennifer Jason Leigh.

Now, it has to be conceded right off that, even by Hollywood's own classical standards, *Hercules* is phenomenally well crafted. For this decisive rebel assault on the cultural fortress, Disney has sent in its A-team of Musker and Clements – now the most successful, and maybe the best, feature-animation directors in history – and even after *Little Mermaid* and *Aladdin* this is easily their finest hour. Though there are still technical wrinkles in the blending of CG and cel animation, particularly in the hydra sequence, *Hercules* is generally state-of-all-its-arts: tightly-scripted, unusually funny, and completely disarming even during the feeble musical numbers, which certainly aren't much threat to *The Jungle Book*. Above all, it's simply beautiful to look at, with stunning backgrounds, some exquisite colour paletting, and some astonishingly-nuanced character rendering that fully justifies the new-style end credits (where voice and animator are bracketed side-by-side). Though Scarfe's designs absolutely deserve their accolades, it's in the execution that the full virtuosity lies. It's easy to admire the performance of James Woods as Hades – or rather, of course, vice-versa, with the animator's delicate recreation of Woodsian moues and mannerisms you only recognize when you see them caricatured. But there's arguably even



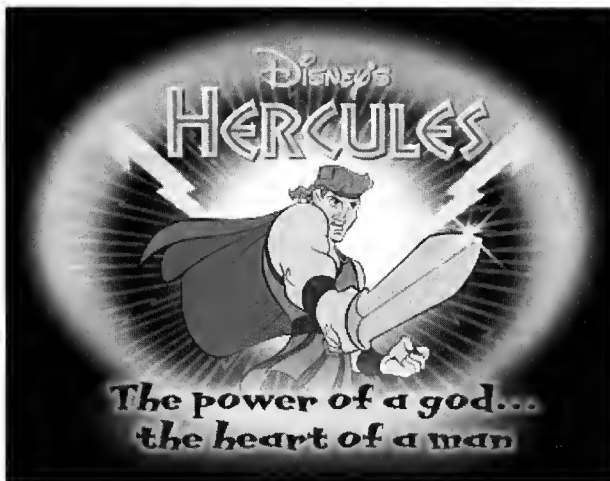
better work in the visual characterization of Susan Egan's Meg, where they don't seem to have used the actress so closely as a template; and even the hero is the nearest thing yet achieved to an appealing Disney human-male lead.

At the same time, it's pretty radical stuff for Disney. The studio's creative trough in the 1970s and 80s is often blamed on the way that, in the dark days following the founder's death, the apostles would gather in the boardroom and make decisions by asking, "What would Walt do?" And not the least impressive thing about *Hercules* is that it's hard to imagine Walt doing anything remotely like it. Certainly it's the first Disney feature to acknowledge that the world of animation has been changed by MTV, Nickelodeon and Spumco: that the plump, cute look of traditional Disney characters has come to seem stilted and outdated, and that the kind of plasticity achieved in *Aladdin*'s genie can sustain an entire movie. Not only that, but it's confident enough of its style to poke fun at Old Disney through the incongruous disguises of the Scarfean demons of Pain and Panic as stubby, big-eyed Art Babbitt kids spouting golden-age dialogue like "Jeepers, Mister!"

Yet this very iconoclasm is unexpectedly true to the spirit of its mythic matter. It goes without saying that there's no such thing as authenticity in Greek myth; or rather, the only true authenticity is radical departure from all known previous variants. Before its rapid ossification in the fourth century BC, myth is a dynamically recombinant and muta-

tional memetic lifeform subjected to one of the most intensive hothouse breeding programmes in the history of the west: the fulfilment of quotas for the Athenian dramatic festivals with up to two dozen new tragedies and satyr-plays a year, out of the same pool of 200 or so recycled stories. There are no correct versions; the only thing that fixes one variant as definitive for later ages is canonization in a literary text so famous that it fossilizes the story against any further mutation. But there are no such works in the Hercules myth-system: no canonical, A-list classical texts dealing directly and extensively with the hero's career, despite walk-on parts in drama and epic, and a couple of tragedies on darker versions of the closing phases of his career. And it's this memetic adaptability that makes myth interesting in the first place. The process is driven by environmental factors: new variants arise, compete for resources, and succeed in reproducing because they fill a niche in the cultural ecology that supports them. Movies are just the same: a chaotic, unpredictable form of memetic engineering in which stories are remade, updated, cannibalized and recombined in a relentless struggle for existence in a world of finite capital. Successful narrative clichés propagate through the meme pool like plot viruses, gobbling up cash from the surrounding ecosystem because they're ideally adapted to the efficient exchange of desire for money that sustains the cycle of growth.

Certainly Disney's own mutations offer a fascinating case study. Herc's best girl Megara is more familiar to the classical tradition as the wife the hero kills *ap*. Euripides and Seneca in a frenzied massacre of his family. In Disney World, such distasteful matters are image-edited out of the picture – though you have to wonder about the motives behind the inclusion of a line like “Meg, I would never ever hurt you.” By comparison, in the network-primetime universe of *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, the victim is wife no. 2 Deianeira (who in Sophocles kills him slowly and painfully in a 300-line death scene, topping herself along the way), and the offender is not the peaceable, unpsychotic hero himself but his divine nemesis Hera, jealous (as in ancient sources) of Zeus's extra-hierogamous mortal nookie with Alcmena. Unfortunately, this begetting, though canonized over and over in 50 versions from Plato Comicus to Cole Porter, is itself something that nice Disney people just don't do. So in this version, Herc is – amazingly –



conceived and born in legal divine wedlock, and the equally-monogamous Alcmena and Amphitryon merely adopt him. (Brisk sounds of subterranean gyration from Plautus, Moliere, Kleist, Giraudoux, &c. &c.)

In the event, though, even the most rampant anachronisms and deviations in this *Hercules* looks rather sedate by comparison with the far cheekier *Legendary Journeys*, with their dotty onomastics (one episode of *Xena* sported a character called Twickenham) and roaming gangs of Mycenaean Maoris. Meanwhile, the copyright-free nature of the material is already breeding all-new memetic variants: Tor currently have a work-gang of *Star Trek* novelists churning out an independent series of Hercules novels – “New Adventures of the Mightiest Hero of All!” – as a mischievous spoiler to the Boulevard *TLJ* spinoffs. What, rather, defines Disney's *Hercules* is its deeper, mythical authenticity: its respect for the meaning invested in the figure of the hero for each culture that retells him. For archaic and classical Greeks, Heracles was the embodiment of the mortal hero at the edge of mortality, the summit of achievement and pain where the mortal condition breaks through to the divine. For Stoics and Romans, he was a culture-hero and mythical model of ideologically-sanctioned behaviour. And for Disney, Herc is the human embodiment of the American hero we all aspire to become, whatever our ethnicity, trading status, or level of disposable income.

Despite its pagan setting and East-Coast yiddishe repartee, *Hercules* is Disney's most openly biblical movie: a distillation of the most extreme of all neoChristian fundamentalisms, playing to every American male's instinctive knowledge that, however dysfunctional and pathetic he may seem to the outside world, he is in fact the Son of God and the indifference of the world to his unappreciated talents are merely part of His passion. “Sometimes I feel,” says Herc to Ma and Pa, “like I don't

belong here – like I'm supposed to be somewhere else” (raises eyes to heaven). (“Yes!” says the audience. “That's exactly how I feel too! Gee whillikins, I must be the Messiah! Golly, is this a feelgood movie or what?”) The choral recitative openly describes this version of the legend as “the gospel truth,” and the narrative dutifully chronicles His divine begetting and becoming man, skipping rapidly to His coming of age and setting forth to prove his godhead (dismissing his mortal parents from the rest of the movie with a perfunctory “Mom, Pop, you're the greatest parents anyone could have, but I've gotta know”), and culminating in his conquest of death, descent into hell, and rising again to sit at the Father's right hand.

And yet, like all true myths, it's very much a gospel of its time. This hero's enemy is not sin, or suffering, or the jealous celestial stepmother of ancient sources, but the one true nemesis of every American, personal Death. (Guess who loses.) Explicit religious teachings are confined to cracker-barrel platitudes like “a true hero isn't measured by the size of his strength but by the size of his heart” (a line the schoolboy-minded will already have completed elsewhere). Most tellingly, though the gospel narrative has been composited with knowing grafts from Joseph Campbell by way of *The Empire Strikes Back*, young Whattageek Destructo-boy Jercules's progress from zero to hero follows a uniquely American trajectory in which it's taken for granted that the deal includes celebrity, worldwide adulation, fabulous riches, and orchestrated global franchising of your name and likeness.

As in *Jurassic Park*, this is a complex kind of irony that tries to disarm you by nudging you that it's tongue-in-cheek: we have to understand that self-deprecating satire of the “I'm an action figure” kind doesn't actually depreciate the sales of, er, action figures. Rather, we should understand that these mass-produced plastic homunculi are not graven images but icons, a lens through which the soul can focus more truly on the divine. Ditto, of course, the lunchboxes, thick shakes, thermofibre pie-warmers, *et cetera ad inf*: not just tools of merchandising, but instruments of contemplation and redemption to raise our eyes to the stars. So *sing*, you pathetic little runts: “I can beat the odds.” (*Whap*.) “I can go the distance.” (*Smack*.) I said SING.

Nick Lowe

**Editor's note:** when he is not reviewing movies for *Interzone* Nick Lowe teaches Greek and Latin classics at the University of London.



It's taken me a while, but I think I've finally cracked this New Year's resolutions thing. What do you mean "it's February"? Now look, we aren't going to get anywhere if you're going to nit-pick. And anyway, it may say February on the cover but I'll bet you're reading this in January. And anyway I'm not referring to the calendar but the anniversary: I resumed writing this column exactly a year ago. And *anyway* it's my column and I'll do New Year's resolutions if I want to. Or a Christmas wish-list. Whatever. I said don't nitpick.

Christmas wish-list? Ah yes, here's the thing. That's why my New Year's resolutions never get, well, resolved: it's because, I now see, there's a difference between wanting something to happen and doing something to make it happen – like for example the way every year I resolve to lose weight without resolving ever actually to do anything about it like, well, dieting or exercise. Sympathetic magic as an agency of lifestyle transformation, I have to tell you, sucks.

So here's my list of 1998 resolutions/wishes for sf and fantasy on television. First, I resolve to find out whether the Lewis Baumander who appears on the credits of *Deepwater Black* is the same Lewis Baumander who directed Keanu Reeves when he performed *Hamlet* in Winnipeg in 1995. (Well of course I was there! It was minus twelve. The theatre made the audience wait outside in the snow instead of letting us in and parting us from our money... and Kevin Sorbo's leather trousers pale into insignificance next to the memory of Keanu's tights. Sigh.) Well I don't care whether you care or not – I have a retentive memory for useless trivia, so every time I see the *Deepwater Black* credits I wonder if it's the same guy, but I have absolutely no desire to do anything so tedious and grown-up as research and so I never manage to overcome inertia long enough to do anything to find out.

I had to have my video set on weekly repeat to record Channel 5 at 2.30 on Sunday afternoons, because I appear to be congenitally incapable of actually remembering to sit down to watch the series, and so I have an astonishing collection of half-watched episodes stuck in the middle of videotapes of other stuff.

*Deepwater Black* is so High Concept it makes your teeth ache... These teens may be clones, but they seem to be the clones of Beverly Hills High School brats as C5's press release had it (actually that makes it sound much better than it is), the plot premise is that teenage clones awake on a spaceship to find they are more or less the sole survivors of the human race and their ship is carrying frozen genetic material to remake the species after a plague wiped out the rest of us. Yes! Teen characters

for the teen audience, carefully colour-coded and gender-paired, but with no background parents/siblings/schooling problems to weigh them down and with a real Higher Destiny to pursue.

So why didn't it work? Well, whether it was a Lewis Baumander or the Lewis Baumander, *Deepwater Black* didn't have a Keanu in the cast so the "Blue Lagoon" plot fix was never going to attract my interest. And unlike, say, C4's teen angst-fest *Party of Five* (don't get me started on *Party of Five*: I haven't been so hooked on a soapy plot since, oh, I don't know, since everyone, but *everyone*, stayed in on Sunday nights to watch *The Forsyte Saga*. One of my enduring memories of 1997 will be of phoning the Channel 4 duty office in anguish because my video cut out before the end of an episode and a soothing duty officer asking me how far I'd got and then talking me through how it finished – "and then Charlie said ... and then you should have seen Julia's face..." Bless their hearts!) All right, breathe, start a new sentence – so, unlike, say, *Po5*, *Deepwater Black* is too thin on character-development, whilst simultaneously being too heavy on plot.

Actually, *Po5* isn't a bad comparison, being similarly stuffed to the gills with teen angst: only its plot development is all designed to illustrate and promote character-development, where *DB*'s plot-development is a random selection of standard sf tropes strung together with bursts of "it's my turn to save the universe this week."

But I don't know: why *doesn't* it work? Oh God, you don't think it's just that I'm now Too Old to Get It?

# Tube Corn

Wendy Bradley

Moving swiftly on to my second resolution, I resolve to stop videoing *VR5*. In this late-night burst of Friday-night tosh on BBC 2 the leading character Sydney's missing/drowned sister is called Samantha – what's the name of Mulder's sister in *The X-Files*? Yes, it's Samantha. I'm sorry but I don't think you can get away with lost Samantha siblings these days. Been there, done that. *VR5* isn't good enough for this to work as a conscious echo of Mulder's alien-abducted sibling but it isn't (quite) bad enough for it to be just sheer carelessness. I resolve to stop videoing it since I now have more unwatched episodes of *VR5* than

Below: *Deepwater Black*: from left, Gret, Reb, Bren, Lise, Zac and Yuna



blank tapes and, yes, they're always in the middle of a tape, so that you can't record the film you're going to miss without also wiping that episode of *Friends* you haven't watched yet.

Why did I *start* videoing it? Now what did I tell you about nitpicking? It looked as though it was going to be an sf series: Sydney is the survivor of a pair of identical twin girls and she has a gizmo which allows her to enter virtual worlds she creates on her computer out of the subconscious of other people, and to take the other people into VR5 with her if she can get them on the end of a telephone. Well, yes, but you have to accept the basic premise to get any further. Well, yes, obviously I have problems with the "sucking people's subconscious into a computer down the phone" idea. Well, yes, I also have problems with the "only Sydney can do this" thread. Well, yes, only Sydney and the drippy hippy who lives next door. Now look, *what did I tell you about nitpicking?*

The VR scenarios are filmed in a kind of lurid "acid trip" colour-

scheme which is quite cool the first time you see it, although the banal gender stereotyping of the scenarios themselves quickly makes this pall. And, for all that I might have overlooked the idiocy of the "sinister government agency takes over her Dangerous Invention" running thread for the sake of seeing the resolution to the "my Dad was the Man from UNCLE and he and Samantha must have drowned for a reason" plotline, I found after a couple of weeks I couldn't get over the kids from *Fame*. Yes, well, I'm sorry, but Lori Singer who played Sydney also blighted the 1980s as the cellist in *Fame*, and the stupider the VR5 plots became the more I kept seeing her sawing away on the cello with that drippy expression on her face. So I'm going to cut out the middle-man and stop videoing it, letting it fester for a month or two and then recording over it, and just ignore it altogether. There. I feel better already.

What else? Oh, lots of things. I resolve to stop watching things that have no new ideas about the future

so that you see the 25th, 27th, 35th century and think "been there, done that" – now does that excuse me from *all* incarnations of *Trek*, and where do I stand on *Babylon 5*? You should never, never, have to come away from an sf programme thinking "I have seen the future and it's boring."

I resolve that there will be British sf that isn't cutesy, Sunday-teatime, *Phoenix* and the *Carpet* kidstuff but also isn't full of dour depressing Manchester mobsters or Dirty Den. And I resolve that, when there *is* something British and designed for an adult audience, it will last longer than five minutes, have a budget of more than five pounds, and get automatically commissioned for a second series. We didn't mean for *Crime Traveller* to be killed off, just improved a bit! And I resolve there will never, ever, be another series of *Bugs*. And to win the lottery.

Ah no; that's that *want-something-to-happen / make-something-happen* thing again, isn't it? Picard to bridge: make it so.

Aw, go on.

Wendy Bradley

## letters continued from page 5

as it developed in the 1930s and 40s, but that's because Gernsback was following a particular route. He wanted to inspire his readers, most of whom were gadgeteers, particularly with the new sciences emerging through the use of electricity.

When *Amazing Stories* came along it had originally been Gernsback's intent to use some of the authors from *Science & Invention* but he had the wit to realize that all of that fiction reproduced on its own had little commercial value. It was only because it had been part of a technical magazine that it made some sense. Most of them were barely stories at all, but sketchy narratives exploring the potential of a new invention – though the Winthrop story that Brian cites is one of the better ones. Gernsback needed to attract writers first and foremost and hopefully those with scientific training. These were almost non-existent, which is why he was forced to reprint so much Verne and Wells material (which he was also able to acquire cheaply). Unfortunately Gernsback was blinded by his own original concept, so that although he did get some fairly good gadgeteer fiction, what he discovered the readers clamoured for were Burroughs and Merritt. With Merritt he had a real problem, because he did not regard his work as scientifically based and he found himself forced to find a way to explain its use in *Amazing*. It became quite a topic of discussion in the magazine. By 1928 the works of Doc Smith and Edmond Hamilton had pushed sf into

the super-science cosmic league from which it rapidly devolved to space opera – though that happened in the pages of *Astounding*. Gernsback tried to avoid that happening in his new magazine, *Wonder Stories*, and in fact it was Gernsback who forced a revival of quality in sf in *Wonder* in 1933-34.

Brian speculates as to why Ray Cummings never wrote for Gernsback's sf magazines. It was all to do with money. Gernsback's worst feature was that he was atrocious at paying authors, even before the Depression. I think he had the same attitude that academic publishers have, and that is that scholars write for the love of it and don't need paying. The contributors to his technical magazines were often scientists or experimenters with other income, so he tried not to pay them at all or, if he did, he paid at the lowest rates possible. He could never adapt to the view that people out there were writing for a living, and he found it difficult to pay anything like a reasonable sum. He had arguments with Burroughs and Wells over payments, and they had the clout to make him pay at least a bit more than the average, which meant he forced other authors into less than the average. Cummings had few outlets in the mid-1920s because *Argosy All-Story* had temporarily moved away from sf, so Gernsback was his only outlet (although he wrote detective fiction for other pulps). Once *Astounding* emerged at the end of 1929 Cummings found a genuine pulp publisher prepared to take his material and pay a good rate promptly. He immediately deserted Gernsback.

What then happened was that *Astounding* used pulp writers with

no grounding in science at all (or very little) to produce pseudo-scientific adventure stories and these soon degenerated into rubbish. There was a tremendous outcry at the time and it was Gernsback, through David Lasser, who did what he could to salvage some quality from sf and reform it. If anyone reads the stories in *Wonder Stories* during 1932-33 they will see how much better they were than anything in *Astounding* and, to a degree, in *Amazing*.

Brian overlooks all of this. Whilst in general I agree with his view of Gernsback – he was something of a scoundrel, there is no doubt about that – I cannot support his conclusion that Gernsback did not believe in the potential of the medium for scientific speculation. That is a gross slur upon Gernsback. It was at the very heart of all that he did believe in.

But he fell victim of two things: (1) his financial practices and (2) his inability to match the potential of scientific adventure stories within the confines of his "gadgeteer" fiction. He broadened this latter view as much as he could, but he could never take it as far as Tremaine did in *Astounding* after 1933. He was of a very similar mind to Campbell – their approach to sf is extremely compatible – but Campbell had the wider super-science vision, whereas Gernsback still liked the kitchen-table invention approach.

I'm half-inclined (had I the time) to produce a full-scale rebuttal to Brian's article, because I do think it denigrates Gernsback's contribution to sf, but maybe I've said enough.

Mike Ashley

# NEW YEAR'S EVE

*Douglas Smith*

**97.12.19**

**Friday, December 19, 1997**

Bogey pushed his black queen's pawn forward to meet John's then leaned back. "Rick's Café Americaine" throbbled white neon at John through a haze of cigarette smoke. Wobbling overhead, fans swirled the smoke in lazy eddies among crowded tables.

"Another closed defence," John muttered.

"You're a closed kinda guy," Bogey replied, immaculate in a white jacket and linen shirt, black bow tie and slacks. The beginning strains of "As Time Goes By" wafted from a piano somewhere off-display. He glared over his shoulder, motioning to a plump white-haired waiter in a black tuxedo. "Carl, get me a whisky, and tell Sam to stop playing that damn song."

"Yes, monsieur Rick, and for you, monsieur?"

"Mr. Dunne doesn't drink, Carl," Bogey said. "He hasn't figured that part out yet."

Carl waddled away as John reached for his king's knight.

"Predictable," Bogey muttered.

John scowled at him but a trilling sound cut off his reply. A telephone appeared, hovering above the table. Bogey lit another cigarette. "Still bothers me when it does that."

"And your smoking still bugs me," John said.

"Then you shoulda left smell out of the equation, kid. Answer the damn thing, will ya?"

The call display on the phone showed an internal PCWare extension and the name 'G.Hong'. John spoke. "Hi, George."

The ringing stopped, replaced by a disembodied voice. "J.D., my man, you still gonna walk me through it Monday?"

"Um, sure, yeah, I guess. Nine okay? Down here?"

"Be there. Have a good weekend. Ciao." Dial tone.

The phone vanished. "Um, I gotta go now," John muttered.

Shrugging, the man in the white jacket tipped over John's ivory king. "Well, you woulda lost anyway. Again."

John's jaw clenched. "Why do you try to irritate me?"

Bogey blew a cloud of smoke at him. "You tell me, kid. You're the programmer." He waved his hand around.

"Probably revenge for what you did to my place."

"What do you mean? It's digitized right from the film."

"Yeah, but you *colourized* it!" Bogey glared at him, poking a finger at John's chest. "The important stuff in life is black and white, kid. Good guys, bad guys. Winners, losers. Us, them. Ones and zeroes. Everything else is just shades of grey. You'll be happier when you learn that."

"So what am I?"

"A good guy mostly. A loser always. One of them. A zero. Going back to her now?" He smiled. "Sure you are. At least in here, she's there when you get home."

"Shut up!" John snapped, manipulating his finger controls to move through the crowded bar. The chuckle behind him faded.

**97.12.20**

**Saturday, December 20, 1997**

*Washington Post*: "Millennium Nightmare? – As we enter a new millennium, will our computers rerun the old one? For years, computer systems stored dates with only the last two digits of the year. The software simply stuck '19' in front when needed for display or calculations. Why? Well, it saved two bytes for each date in the system. Storage was expensive and smaller records meant faster I/O. Such systems would store today's date as 971220 (year-month-day for sorting). However, on January 1, 2000, a system with six-digit dates will merrily inform you the date is January 1, 1900, based on its stored date value of 000101. Analysts estimate 'Year2000' code fixes will cost \$600 billion worldwide, and predict over 90% of current systems will fail on January 1, 2000."

**97.12.21**

**Sunday, December 21, 1997**

At a bare white table in his small apartment, Ed Lochs nursed a beer as he dialled into the PCWare LAN from his home machine. Suspecting all was not well with his job at PCWare, Ed had used his role as a support tech to install a program on the company's internal network. The program scanned E-mail traffic for message text containing his name, encrypting a copy of any such message to a file in Ed's private directory.

Now at home, he downloaded that file and entered a decrypt string. Messages for the week rolled in black



and white across his monochrome screen. On the third one, he stopped. *Shit.*

TO: Sanjit Mohammed-taki, HR Director

FROM: Donald Masatoshi, VP New Products

DATE: 12/19/97

TOPIC: *Employee Termination Notice needed*

Sanj, as discussed, please prepare an ETN for Edward B. Lochs, effective January 6, 1998, based on three consecutive performance ratings below 4.0. Thx, Maz.

*Asshole.* Taking a swallow of beer, he switched screen windows and ran a program prepared weeks before. It finished and a grin creased his pale unshaven face. Connecting to the network again, he copied the program to a Project VR directory of modules which interfaced to date routines in PCWare's Portals 7.0 operating system. He entered his password as a VR team member to replace the existing program and signed off.

*Have to wait a while, two years and a bit, but it'll be worth it.* Swallowing the last of his beer, he raised the bottle in a mock toast. "Happy New Year!"

**97:12:22**

### Monday, December 22, 1997

After losing again to Bogey, John stepped from the bar onto New York's 5th Avenue, the Santa Claus parade underway. A huge penguin loomed from a passing iceberg float. Crowds watched in a light snow, the air crisp with car fumes and people smells.

*Hey, cool! I love parades.*

The voice made John jump. "Jesus, George! You scared me."

*Sorry, compadre. I said hello, but you didn't answer so I just grabbed the other VR unit. So where are we?*

"New York, 1946, December morning."

*Man, it looks real! A lot better than version zero.*

"We use full multimedia links with WorldSource – TV, movies, news, songs, documentaries, encyclopedias, almanacs..."

*And everything else our fearless leader bought rights to.*

The clip-clop of passing Clydesdales cut through George's words, moving gradually from John's left to right ear.

*Hey! You've got directional sound.*

"We track head movement relative to the sound source in the scene, adjusting the volume in each ear accordingly."

*Holy shit! Literally. I smell the horses, popcorn...*

"We code scenes with aroma keys. A special hardware unit holds a platter embedded with over 5,000 highly compressed aroma pellets. The platter spins to the aroma key location and a laser-burst heats that spot on the disk. The unit captures the vapours and shoots them through a tube to the helmet."

*Smell-o-vision finally arrives. Yuck.*

"Laporte calls it VaporWare. It adds a third sense to the sight and sound of VR. Smell's mostly ignored but it's a powerful sense, you know. Taste depends heavily on smell."

*Touch is high on my list, like with that blonde over there.* John squirmed. "Touch is left to the imagination."

*Which, in my case, is pretty scary. So, how about a tour?*

"Um, okay. I'll empty the street first so it'll be easier moving around. Computer, clear scene." With the words, the crowds and parade blinked off, like a B-

movie special effect.

*Kinda spooky. So how's it work?*

"Okay, each building contains a different VR scene. This street is the main menu. Stroll along and enter buildings, or call up a map image and jump directly. The place on the right is the games room, set for chess in the café from Casablanca."

*I thought this was New York, 1946?*

"Each room can be different. The VR interface creates a room scene based on four characteristics defined by the user: city, time of day, month, year. You can change any parameter in any room. I've played around a bit to test the links."

*City and year for location and era. Why month and time?*

"Attention to detail. The month for correct weather and flora. Time defines the position of the sun, or moon. But year's the real key. We use it to retrieve multimedia clips from WorldSource to recreate the world you see. So where to?"

*Better go over the controls.*

John began to explain how to manoeuvre with glove controls and head motions. Then his voice trailed off, as the tall, slim figure of a woman stepped out of a building in the VR background and strolled toward them, each step accomplished with a languid roll of her hips.

*Whoa! The scenery just improved. Who's this?*

John's stomach knotted. He swallowed. "Uh, we use software 'agents' to execute certain tasks. We gave some human form, like this one. She acts as a guide, help desk..."

She stopped near-foreground, flipping long black hair over the shoulder of a white pant suit. "Hello." Her voice was husky but feminine. "You're not Johnny. What's your name?"

*Uh, George Hong, Team Leader, Millennium Project.*

"Voice print validation in progress." Pause. "George Li Hong. Employee: 5053. Status: active. Project VR clearance: invalid." She smiled. "Sorry, Georgie. You're not cleared to be in here. I'm shutting you down. Too bad," she added, with a little pout, "you're kinda cute." The world went white.

*She appears to act like a security guard as well.*

"Uh, yeah. I'll restart, give you clearance, and switch control to you. I'll turn her off."

*I'd rather turn her on. She looked familiar.*

John didn't answer. They spent the next hour touring the VR city. Finally, George said he'd had enough. The scene faded to white. John removed a sleek black visor and helmet, blinking at the office lights. Black vines of computer cables hung everywhere, and paper sprouted like white fungus in every corner of the cramped office. He watched George pull off the shiny black VR gloves. "So what did you think?"

Flipping his ponytail over the back of the seat, George tipped his chair back, threatening a precariously balanced pile of manuals. "So it's incredible. I'm blown away. This will grab the small part of the market PCWare doesn't already own. You're a bloody genius." He looked at John. "So why so glum?"

"Maz asked me to demo it to Laporte after New Year's. He wants the VR interface released with version 7.0 of Portals."

"And this is a bad thing? A demo for the man himself?"

John stared at his black VR gloves, his mouth dry.

"I'm no good in front of people I don't know. Especially an important person. I'm not good around people period. Don't like bars and parties. That's why Eve and I..." He couldn't finish.

"Eve! That's the babe in there! I knew she was familiar. With her hair pulled back, I didn't..." George halted abruptly, as John felt his face grow hot. "Uh, sorry, J.D."

"It's okay," John mumbled, embarrassed. "I mean, it's been a year since she... we decided to split up."

George gave a small smile. "Yeah, right." He rearranged the VR gloves. "So why'd you pick Eve for the VR guide?"

John fidgeted. "Um, well, we can't use professional models till Legal checks on royalties and stuff. But we wanted someone beautiful. And Eve is beautiful, isn't she?"

"Yeah, J.D., Eve is beautiful," George said softly.

"So I used our home movies, and the multimedia link, to create her as an agent," John said smiling. He felt good talking about her as his creation.

"And Eve said it's okay?"

John hesitated. "Um, sure. I mean, it's not like we don't talk. She calls me, oh, a couple times a week. Just to talk."

George looked away. "Good. Glad you're still friends."

John squirmed in his chair as George went on. "She seemed to really carry on a conversation. How'd you manage that?"

Relieved to talk about something purely technical, John relaxed. "We worked with psych departments, formal language groups, and AI researchers to develop an agent-interface program, an expert system which responds to statements and questions, based on a given Myers-Briggs personality type."

George blinked. "So agents not only carry on intelligent conversation, they have their own personalities too?"

"Well, I'm not sure how intelligent it is. They respond precisely to system commands, and to a range of questions or statements. However, the longer the chain of questions, or the more obscure, the more their response will seem out of context, or," he added, thinking of Bogey, "like a cryptic platitude."

George played with the black VR helmet absently. "Sight, sound, smell. Access to WorldSource, the largest collection of knowledge on the globe. Now, full interplay with VR humans."

"Not full. No touching." He thought of Eve.

"Or taste," George said with a grin. John grimaced.

**98:01:06**

## Tuesday, January 6, 1998

Ink sketches in ebony frames stood out starkly against eggshell walls in the executive board room. Like some chaotic chess board, white paper pads spotted the obsidian sheen of a huge oval conference table. Black curtains covered each window, in defense against the frosty light and falling snow.

Don Masatoshi, VP New Products, regarded John Dunne, fidgeting in the chair beside him, hands trembling in black VR-gloves under the table. *Damn*. Maz brushed white shag rug hairs from the cuffs of his charcoal slacks and cleared his throat. "John, in the demo, I will do the talking. I know him better than you. You just manipulate the glove controls."

John's shoulders relaxed. "Thanks, Mas-san. I..."

"Forget it. We do not pay you to be a salesman. I need

your skill with those." He tapped one of John's black gloves.

John smiled weakly then stiffened as the door flew open and Robert Laporte, Chairman, CEO, and majority shareholder of PCWare, exploded into the room. "Let's get this show on the road!" he boomed. Short, balding, and bespectacled, he projected the energy level of a rocket on a launching pad.

A baggy white sweat shirt and black denims flapped loosely on his lean frame, as he strode quickly to where Maz and John sat. "Masatoshi-san, you all set? John, isn't it?"

John rose to shake hands but the VR wires pulled him back. Maz groaned inwardly, but Laporte waved John down, slapping him on the shoulder. "Okay, Maz, so you'll walk me through Project VR, literally. Then we'll talk about whether it's part of 7.0. Which I would hope, since you promised it for 6.0 a year ago."

Maz started to reply, but Laporte chuckled. "I'm ribbing you, Maz. Hell, we weren't sure PCs could handle full VR a year ago. Now the hardware's caught up. The VR gear too. We've cut unit costs to where I can give the gear away with 7.0." Laporte smiled as Maz raised an eyebrow. "Hey, my goal's market penetration, fast acceptance of the VR interface. With each copy, we throw in the helmet and gloves." He grinned. "Assuming you show me a product to sell."

Maz returned the grin. "Certainly." He motioned to John. "John is technical leader for Project VR. I will talk us through the demo, while John manoeuvres us through the scenes, so I do not walk us into a sewer." Maz paused as Laporte chuckled. "Now, please put on your helmet, and we will start."

For two hours, they hid behind the smoky visors and jet gloss of VR helmets, as Maz talked and John worked the gloves to tour the virtual city. Bogey and Casablanca were the hits Maz expected. "It's like the guy's alive," Laporte said.

Bogey shook his head as John declined a chess game. "Like I said, kid, life's black and white. You gotta pick a side and play the game. Is that why she left you? You wouldn't play the game?" He extended his fists, a pawn hidden in each. "Pick one, kid. You might win this time."

*What the hell?* thought Maz. "Uh, we are running late, and the last room contains just simple office automation. Let's move to questions." They pulled off their helmets.

Laporte shook his head. "Looks fantastic."

"So Release 7.0 will include the VR interface?" Maz asked.

"View-ee," Laporte corrected. "V-U-I. Like in 'goosey' for the soon-to-be forgotten GUI. Virtual-Reality User Interface."

"What happened to the 'R'?" asked Maz.

"Verooey was not to Marketing's taste. Plus the VUI gives a new way to 'view' computers. Nice ring to it, too. As in cash registers." Laporte chuckled. "Good work, gentlemen."

Maz grinned, thinking of the vacant post of Executive VP of Operations. Winners and losers, he thought, yin and yang.

**98:01:07**

## Wednesday, January 7, 1998

*Bits and Bytes*, PCWare Internal Newsletter: "Yesterday I approved our Virtual-reality User Interface, the

VUI (that's View-ee), for Portals 7.0, scheduled for retail March 2, 1998. We'll hold demos for staff over the next month. On a related note, we've promoted John Dunne, Project VR Leader, to Manager, Quality Assurance. Congratulations, John! — Robert Laporte."

98:01:26

### Monday, January 26, 1998

Snow opaqued the bottom of the palace windows, splitting each pane into white frost and inky night. Moving among the revellers, John sipped white nectar from an obsidian goblet, which tasted exactly like the milk in his black Batman mug.

He was working late, testing the VUI's date interface with Portals 7.0. A millennium's eve party gave him a fun way to verify the system year would flip to 2000 after December 31, 1999. It also let him be with Eve, alone in the office.

"Eve, set date, 1999-12-31. Set time, 11:30pm."

She stepped from the crowd in a long sable gown. "Another New Year's Eve, Johnny? I would've thought the last one was enough for you." She looked around. "Or have you programmed out the exits, so I can't walk out this time?"

His face grew hot. "Please acknowledge the date change."

She shrugged. "Acknowledged."

John watched as the hands on a nearby grandfather clock whirled to 11:30. He swallowed. "Would you like to dance?"

"Nope. Would you like to come upstairs?"

"What? What do you mean?"

She smiled. "What do you think?" She began a slow climb of the curving staircase. Her long pale legs split the folds of her black gown with every step. With shaking fingers, John worked the gloves to follow her up winding stairs and through a maze of white carpeted halls until finally she turned into a room ahead of him. Reaching it, he stopped in the doorway.

She stood with a foot on a bed canopied in black silk, exposing the length of her leg. Reaching under a raven cascade of hair, she undid her gown, letting it fall to her hips. Her breasts were bare, nipples painted black. As she moved her foot from the bed, the gown fell to the floor, over black panties, garter belt and stockings, stark against white skin.

"Eve," he croaked.

Her smile held neither warmth nor invitation. "What's the matter, Johnny? Why don't you come and hold me?" She kicked off black high heels, and flowed onto the white sheets of the bed. Arching her back, she very slowly pulled her panties down to her thighs. Slipping them off, she lay back, legs spread. "Still over there?" she mocked. "You're about as good in a VR bedroom as you were in our real one."

His eyes burned but he couldn't tear them from her.

"Guess I'll just have to do it myself." Smiling, she moved a hand to between her legs. Somewhere a clock chimed midnight.

He continued to watch, until his own orgasm hit him, like in a wet dream. Taken by surprise, his spasms tore the wires from one glove, dropping the link. Ripping off the visor, he sat sobbing in the chair for several minutes, then stumbled to the washroom in the empty

office. After, he put his parka on, and headed home in the swirling whiteness of a night storm.

98:03:02

### Monday, March 2, 1998

*Wall Street Journal*: "PCWare Inc. has released version 7.0 of Portals, their popular operating system for personal computers, incorporating the world's first Virtual Reality User Interface, or VUI ('View-ee'). PCWare's founder, Robert Laporte, stated that he expects the VUI to completely replace the GUI point-and-click interface common to most PCs. PCWare's bundling of the VUI and VR gear at no cost into version 7.0 drew charges of unfair competition practices from a group of other software vendors, since only PCWare's VaporWare technology and WorldSource multimedia interface with the VUI."

John leaned back in his chair, as he finished reading the article to George. "Think he'll get away with it again?"

George snorted. "Does Mickey Mouse have ears?"

"Pretty soon," mused John, "you won't need a mouse."

George grimaced. "Pretty soon, you won't need a world." Pointing a hand in a black VR glove at John, he made a trigger pulling motion. "Zap! Reality is gone. Virtuality is all. Dial me a year, click me a place, and program me a life."

John thought of Eve, but said nothing.

98:11:30

### Monday, November 30, 1998

*New York Times*: "Early Q4 sales have far exceeded forecasts for PCWare's Portals 7.0. Analysts estimate that 95% of PCs in the world will use 7.0 by Q2 1999. The growth is credited to a rapid and rabid adoption of the VUI and the astute decision by PCWare to provide the requisite VR equipment with Portals 7.0."

98:12:31

### Thursday, December 31, 1998

Head bowed, John's tears dropped onto his visor, distorting the image of Eve in a black leather skirt, smoky stockings, and loose white blouse. Through the streaks, her black lipstick smile writhed like an adder across her face. She turned away.

"You can't do this to me again, Eve!" he cried.

"End of the old, start of the new. Time for a change."

"Don't leave. Not on New Year's Eve again. I've changed."

She looked back at him. "No, you haven't, Johnny. You're still the same boring little loser, a zero. You made me so much like the real Eve that I feel the same way about you."

"You are the real Eve," he blubbered. "I love you."

She shook her head. "The choice is always black and white to me, but you always choose wrong." She walked away.

He reached for her, not with the glove controls, but with his arms. Leaning forward in his office chair, he toppled to the floor, ripping wires from the helmet and gloves, cutting the VUI connection. His head cracked against a table leg.

He awoke, George and Maz kneeling over him. George helped him into a chair. "Shit, J.D., what happened? You okay?"

"Eve," he murmured. "She must still be in the building."



"What're you saying? Eve moved to Vancouver a year ago."

"Can't let her leave me again. Black or white. Gotta choose right this time, black or white." He looked up at them.

Maz stared at him for a breath, then turned to George, shaking his head. "Take him home."

George sighed. "Stay put. I'll get your coat."

John stared out the window at pearly flakes falling against the soot of the night sky. "Black or white," he whispered.

**99:01:29**

**Friday, January 29, 1999**

*Bits and Bytes*, PCWare Internal Newsletter: "John Dunne, Project VR team leader, and more recently our QA Manager, is taking a well deserved paid LOA, in recognition of his role in 7.0's success. Thanks John! Enjoy your break! During John's absence, George Hong will act as interim QA Manager."

**99:09:20**

**Monday, September 20, 1999**

*Los Angeles Times*, Fast Forward column: "Industry analysts estimate the world will have 270 million PC's at the turn of the century. With PCWare's Portals 7.0 holding an estimated 95% market share, more than a quarter of a billion people will be plugged into the now ubiquitous VUI by Year 2000."

**99:12:17**

**Friday, December 17, 1999**

Maz eased back into the black leather of the corner booth of Flanagan's dimly lit bar, feeling the warmth from his third scotch. "So what can the new Executive VP of Operations do for his favourite propeller head?"

George Hong sat slumped in the opposite seat, looking like his puppy had died. "Mas-san, you know about Year 2000 date issues, right? Remember a PCWare project called Millennium?"

The older man nodded. "1994. We scanned for year 2000 problems in Portals. Two-digit year fields and calculations. Millennium produced fixes for release 5.2 which hit retail, let's see, November 95. What about it?"

"You remember a PCWare employee named Ed Lochs? Tall, skinny, balding? You turfed him just before the 7.0 release."

Maz frowned. "Yes. Serious performance problems. So?"

The techie sighed. "One of my people was surfing some UK web sites. She kept hearing this buzz about a bug in Portals."

Maz felt a tightness in his throat. "And?"

"She traced an E-mail chain back to Ed Lochs. He's on contract for some software apps firm in Dublin. I got worried and checked into what we had him on before he left. His last assignment was Project VR, coding the interface between the VUI and the Millennium date fixes. He added a patch in late '97. I had one of my people look at it."

Maz stared at him. George sighed and continued. "We found a Millennium bug in the VUI date link."

Maz shook his head. "The 5.2 Millennium date routines have been on the market for four years. A 5.2 bug would have shown by now, in calculations projecting past 1999. We never touched 5.2 date code after the fix. When we designed 7.0, we simply called the 5.2 rou-

tines, because we knew they were clean."

George nodded. "Yeah, but 7.0 included the VUI. The first thing the VUI does is call a 7.0 module called 'SceneSet,' to get the system date. SceneSet then links to WorldSource to set the VR scenario, pulling backgrounds, agent costumes, era detail, etc., *all based on the year in the system date.*"

"Which should be correct from 5.2 fixes," Maz repeated.

George sighed. "Version 5.2 changed the system date to a four-digit year all right, but thanks to Lochs, now Sceneset in 7.0 only picks up the last two digits. Once 2000 hits, the VUI will think it's 1900, and show all rooms as from that era."

"That's it? What about date displays, prints, calcs?"

George shook his head, black ponytail falling down his white T-shirt. "All okay. It's just the VUI scene setter."

Maz snorted. "Big deal. Embarrassing, but the VUI will work. Once the system starts, the user can override to 2000."

"Nope. The scene setter won't accept a future date, since it can't link to WorldSource for a year which it thinks hasn't occurred yet. And the VUI will think it's 1900."

Maz groaned. "So it will be stuck in 1900 forever?"

"Until the real year flips to 2001, when you'll have the much larger choice of 1900 or 1901," George replied. "Plus, most users have by now customized their own VR rooms from different years. Any room later than 1900 will cause an error, defaulting back to 1900 scenes, pissing off a lot of people."

"Only 250 million. You sure of this?"

"Shit, yes. I worked through the night on it, then had my staff run through it again today. Sorry, Maz. It's real."

Maz looked at George for a long while. He thought of his promotion, his chalet in the Muskokas, his black Porsche Carrera with the white leather seats.

"Black and white, too," George mused.

"What?" said Maz startled.

"WorldSource photographs and movie reconstructs for 1900 are black and white. It'll all be black and white."

**99:12:30**

**Thursday, December 30, 1999**

*New York Times*, High Tech page: "PCWare CEO Robert Laporte has terminated the contract of Donald Masatoshi, Executive VP, Operations. Laporte held Masatoshi principally responsible for the 'Millennium' bug in the Portals 7.0 operating system, installed on virtually every personal computer in the world. PCWare also fired a software engineer over the incident."

**99:12:31**

**New Year's Eve, 1999**

Maz moved through the *kata* with the fluidity and grace of a dancer, the sleeves of his white *gi* snapping with each punch and block, his black belt whipping with each hip turn. The doorbell rang as he stepped into the final moves. His shouted "Come" substituted for the *kiai* on the last *shuto*, as he pulled up to the formal ending and bowed to invisible judges.

"Mas-san," a voice said quietly behind him.

Maz turned to face George Hong, standing at the door to the dojo room, black motorcycle jacket over a cream cotton T-shirt. George bowed and entered, tossing a thick white towel to Maz.

Maz wiped his face. "You saw him?"

"Yeah, for all the good it did. Told him Laporte canned him along with you, but I'm not sure he understood." George shook his head. "John's lost it, Maz. Thanked me for dropping in and said he was late for a very important date."

"The white rabbit?"

George didn't smile. "With Eve, in VR. He just turned his back on me, slipped on that damn black helmet, and tuned me out. I kept talking, but he ignored me. I let myself out."

"The sword and Zen are one," Maz murmured, stepping through another *kata*. "Martial arts and Zen agree on many points. Both forbid attachment to things. No matter how many techniques the karateka masters, if his mind becomes attached to techniques, he cannot win." Maz finished and looked at George. "The mind must not become fixed. Our John has become fixed, lost by attaching to a memory." He pointed to the white bundle of papers under George's arm. "What do you have there?"

"Another problem."

Maz sighed. "Do you know what the Greeks did to messengers such as you? Come into the sun room." He led George down a black-tiled hall to a glassed room at the back of the sprawling bungalow. They settled into white wicker chairs.

Squinting against the snow outside, George slipped on black RayBans. "Been doing some research on the Net. Medical web sites, chats with clinics, psychologists, universities."

"About what?"

"War of the Worlds broadcast, Nazi propaganda mechanisms. Mass psychoses, large scale hallucinations." He pulled papers from his pile, plopping them on the table as he spoke. "Mass media campaigns, subliminal advertising, AI. And, new studies on long-term exposure to sophisticated VR, like 7.0."

Maz rubbed his temples, feeling his fatigue. "My friend, I've had better weeks, so if you have a point..."

George leaned forward, slipping the sun glasses to the end of his short nose. "Two hundred and fifty million people." Maz blinked. George went on. "Two hundred and fifty million VR users, thanks to the VUI and WorldSource and VaporWare and Laporte giving away VR sets. All seeing an exact copy of a wrong reality, thanks to the VUI bug. Tomorrow, a quarter of a *billion* VR users will slip on those damned black helmets and into a 1900 world, a world accurate to the minutest detail."

"What are you driving at?"

George tapped the top paper. "Stanford, May 1997: Doctors exposed subjects to a range of everyday scenarios, some in real life, some in VR. As exposure to VR grew, subjects experienced increasing difficulty reconstructing whether events occurred in reality or in VR. The same experiment was repeated with more scenarios and a larger test group at the University of Toronto in 98, and this year at McGill in Montreal." George leaned forward again. "The McGill study had 500 subjects. Similar effects, but with a kicker: staff controlling the tests experienced the same distorted perception of reality."

"Leading you to believe what?"

George took a breath. "I think that 250 million VR-users all seeing the same distorted view of reality at once could affect... reality. I think that on New Year's

Day reality could change to what a quarter of a billion users see in VR."

Maz stared at the programmer, then threw back his head, roaring with laughter as George reddened. "So tomorrow we wake up to 1900 outside? Is that it? We ride in carriages and wear those funny hats? Oh, George, thank you. My problems now seem so small." Maz rose and still chuckling went to a black enamelled cabinet, white dragons on each door. "Scotch?"

George stared at the snow hitting the dark asphalt of Maz's curving driveway. "Yeah, sure." He muttered something else.

Maz handed him a glass. "What did you say?"

"A quarter of a billion people," George said quietly.

00:01:01

## New Year's Day

On the first day of the new Millennium, John Dunne rose early, donned his black VR helmet and gloves, and settled down in front of his computer. Shortly before noon, he removed the helmet, placing it on his lap. He sat for another half hour, black-gloved hand tapping on his white terry robe. Finally he rose, and dressed slowly. Donning a white ski jacket and black toque, he stepped onto the street. Black of city dirt mixed with the white of new snow to cover all with a wet grey smear.

Cabs sped by, ignoring his hail. Buying a paper, he began to walk and read. An article on the new space shuttle program caught his eye, along with a promotion announcement at PCWare.

A clip-clop sound caused him to turn. Still no taxis, but a horse-drawn trolley approached. He hailed it. Patting the glossy black rump of the closest horse, he pulled his Macintosh aside and climbed into the car, placing his top hat on the seat beside him. Turning back to his paper, he read that F.W. Woolworth, projecting revenues of \$5 million, had opened his 59th store. He scanned an article on McKinley's "full dinner pail" re-election campaign, and an editorial on the Democratic ticket of William Jennings Bryan and Adlai Stevenson.

The driver signalled his stop, and John stepped down to find her waiting. Mud speckled the ruffle at the foot of her long black dress. She leaned demurely on a white parasol, which had been open to protect her bonnet from the snow.

"Eve," he said smiling. He pulled her close, thrilling to her body against his, the taste of her lips.

"You're late," she teased but with warmth.

"Many years late, I fear."

"No matter," she replied. They walked into the park, her white gloved hand resting lightly on the black of his sleeve.

"I think," he said, "it will be a happy new year."

She smiled but didn't answer.

**Douglas Smith** is a new Canadian writer who lives in Unionville, a small suburb of Toronto, where he works as head of technology for an international consulting firm. His other short-story credits include sales to the annual Canadian anthology, *Tesseract* 6 (December 1997), and to *Dark Horizons* (UK, forthcoming in 1998).

# Resting Place

*Keith Brooke*

“**Y**ou ask again, about the sounds you heard today,” said the guide. The group was preparing to spend the night in a traditional cane and skin summer lodge but now every face was turned towards the young man. He, in turn, studied the nine westerners, in their Goretex and denim, their glossy leather hiking boots with the multicoloured laces. “Come,” he said, “and I will tell you about a time when your predecessors were new to this land. I will tell you about a young man, to whom I am distantly related, and about his dead sister...”

Henza gazed blankly at the face of his dead sister. It was the seventh day of his vigil.

It was almost as if he was gazing at his own reflection in still water, for he was aware that he shared with Gilgeth a feminine cast of the features that marked him as different from the other mountain-hardened men of the village. Their faces were ravaged and reddened by exposure to the wind and the cold whereas he, a teacher, only worked out of doors at the busiest of times.

Henza sniffed the air, and was satisfied that the sweet odour betrayed no signs of the onset of decay. He muttered prayers to the mountain spirits and to his ancestors, just to be sure. Gilgeth's corpse must stay fresh for twelve more days at the least, he estimated. If they burned her too soon they might also burn her spirit and then she would be irrevocably lost for eternity. If, however, they left her too long and the rot was allowed to set in, then the Taker of Souls might reanimate Gilgeth's remains and use her to his own vile ends. It was a fine balance to strike, but it was so important to his people's beliefs that Henza had never known the process to be carried out incorrectly. During the past seven days he had barely slept, so gravely did he take his responsibility.

He stood and left the Lodge of Mourning.

The Lodge was a low building, carved partly into the mountain-side and built up to its shoulder-high eaves

with blocks of stone cut so finely that they needed no mortar to bind them together. Apart from the prayer flags that flew from the roof, the building blended well with its bare surroundings, so that only one who knew of its presence would be able to detect it from any distance.

Rookah, the people's Sayer, had already visited at dawn, and he would come again at dusk, but that left Henza plenty of time for what he needed to do. He set off, across the slope of the valley in which the Lodge lay. In a short time he was at the gaping mouth of a larger valley, scrambling up over the moss-coated rubble that formed the great glacier's terminal moraine.

When Henza reached the ice-face, he paused to recover his breath. Below him, a ragged band of choughs had returned to the moraine, chattering and tumbling as they rose and settled, rose and settled. It was clear today, and all around him the mountains shrugged mightily skywards. Henza knew that many would regard such a view with something approaching awe, but he felt none of that: the mountains were his master, neither enemy nor friend. They were simply *there*.

Rested, he set out along the ice-face, until he found the site of his previous workings. He drew a hammer and chisel from his belt and started to hack a groove into the ice, pausing frequently, for he found such work exhausting. Eventually he had freed a block as tall as himself, and as broad as he was at the shoulders. Other men, he knew, could carve a bigger block in less time, but it was Henza's sister in the Lodge below and he was determined to perform the required duties himself. When Gilgeth's time was called by Rookah, she would be as fresh as on the day the fever had taken her. Henza's ice and his prayers, and the dried petals he scattered over her, would see to that.

After another rest, he carved a groove into the block of ice and secured a rope around it. With a heave, he toppled the block, and then he worked his way between it and the glacier and forced it free with the strength



of his legs. It took him some time to work the block of ice down over the moraine, even though he had selected this site for the ease of its passage. Once on the valley floor, the going was easier, but it still took Henza the rest of the afternoon to drag his ice down to the Lodge.

Rookah was waiting, impatient.

"She is all right?" asked Henza, suddenly concerned.

"She is," snapped the Sayer. Then he seized Henza by the scruff of his yak's wool jacket and hauled him inside the Lodge. "But feel the temperature!" he hissed. "You want her to rot before her soul is released? You care so little?"

Henza felt warm, but then he had been working on his block of ice all afternoon. His face, too, flushed hotly with shame and resentment – what right had Rookah to doubt his devotion to the fate of Gilgeth's soul? "I have more ice," he gasped.

"That? Kaliq brought twice as much for his father. You should be ashamed." Kaliq's father had lain in the Lodge for 46 days before his time was called and his body burnt. But Kaliq's father had died at the end of the previous winter, with the glacier far closer to the Lodge than it currently lay.

Henza said nothing.

He bowed his head and begged tolerance and then, when Rookah had departed, Henza said the prayers that the Sayer had forgotten, in his anger, to say.

Gilgeth's time was called, 26 days into her Passage into Grace.

When the 16th day had passed, Henza knew that, despite all Rookah's criticisms, he had done well. By the time Rookah emerged from the Lodge on that 26th day, Henza even thought it possible that he could detect a hint of respect in the old Sayer's countenance.

"It is time," said Rookah, in the prescribed form. "The Soul is free of its physical entrapments. After the cold of ice we must use fire to guard your sister's liberty from the bounds of evil."

When Henza entered the Lodge again, he saw that Rookah had moved his sister's corpse onto the litter Henza had lovingly crafted from bamboo and goat-skin. Her body had been bound tightly in more skins, so that only her eyes were visible. He stared at her and she, in turn, stared back. He looked around at the candles and the baskets of dried petals, preserved from the spring. He took the handles of Gilgeth's litter and started the long descent towards the village.

It was a morning typical of the end of summer. Mist swimming in the dark valleys, the sun splashing gold across the jagged peaks. By the track a scattering of late potentillas and gentians made their last desperate attempts at procreation.

By the time he had reached the village, he was below the level of the clouds and the peaks were hidden. Normally the men would be out on the slopes, rounding up the herds for the winter, and the women would be cooking and preserving the crops and meat. But today, Rookah had spread word of Henza and Gilgeth's descent and so all work had been suspended. Already, the fire smouldered, a long, sunken bed of charcoal that had been brought up from the foothills. The cremation rack was laid out by the pyre, its blackened metal grid overlaid with petals and herbs arranged with meticu-

lous precision.

At Rookah's signal two men came forward and took Gilgeth so that she could be placed on the rack. As a gaggle of old women gathered round to ensure the correct arrangement of his sister, Henza sank to his knees, and allowed himself to drink from a ladle of soup one of his boys offered him. He was their teacher and they, at least, respected him.

Later, accompanied by Rookah, he examined Gilgeth where she lay. They had prepared her beautifully – bound in place with twisted silk scarves, wrapped in fresh furs and smothered in more dried petals. Henza was pleased. He nodded and the same two men raised her on the rack and placed her over the burning coals.

It was not long before the smell of her cooking meat reached his nose. Sickened, he felt the juices in his stomach multiplying. He chewed on a hard crust of bread, and drank deeply anything that was offered to him.

The day passed by in a blur of faces, all saying the appropriate things. Gilgeth's smell transformed itself as the day grew old, until it was indistinguishable from ordinary smoke.

Around Henza, people danced and laughed, and eventually he passed out and someone must have been good enough to haul him back to his own summer lodge, because that was where he found himself the following dawn, as new sunlight found its way in through the familiar gaps in the skins.

He sat, and waited for his spinning senses to settle. And then he saw the neat pile of blackened bones on the floor. He reached out and touched them. Still warm: close to body temperature, he realized.

Out fetching water, later in the morning, he received the first of the barbed comments.

"Have you taken her up yet, eh?" The old woman snickered, then turned back to her friend.

"I have to finish the carving," Henza muttered, knowing that he could not reasonably be expected yet to have taken Gilgeth's bones up the rough slopes of the next mountain and deposited them in the Resting Place.

A few days later he realized why he was being treated like this. Some of the villagers had always displayed a sense of resentment towards him. He had been away, and received an education, and then come back to his people as a teacher. He knew what others did not and so, in some undefined sense, he was seen as a threat.

But there was more to it than that. The source of this current attitude towards him was older than the jealousies he knew so well.

As a boy he had been struck down by the same fever that had so recently taken Gilgeth. He had lain unconscious and hotter than burning charcoal for 20 days before his father had plucked up the courage to act. Under cover of darkness – for otherwise he would have been prevented – his father had slung Henza across his shoulders and set out down the mountain. He had marched for five days until he reached a settlement of the rich men from the west. Somehow he had managed to pay them to heal his son with their exotic medicines and Henza had made a rapid recovery.

On returning to the village, however, the two were not welcomed as they had expected. The people were angry that Henza's father had not consulted them before acting so rashly. They had already started the

rites in preparation for Henza's Laying in Grace. The Guardian of the Resting Place would have been alerted by this and would be expecting the deposition of the boy's freshly burned and carved bones.

Now, Henza was surprised to realize that resentment for his father's acts still lingered after all this time. These people, who were his neighbours and friends, were willing his Fate to catch him up! For they all believed that if he was brave enough to take Gilgeth's bones up to the Resting Place, the Guardian would never let him escape for a second time.

When he realized this, Henza began to suspect that on some level he, too, had feared what Fate might hold in store for him. But, unlike the older people of this village, he was an educated man! He would have none of this.

He saw no reason why he should feel intimidated by the crude superstitions of his neighbours. That night he completed the carving of his sister's blackened bones: the lines of her personal prayer, the names of her ancestors, the ancient symbols of the gods. In the morning, he set out.

The village was little more than a haphazard cluster of summer lodges gathered around a larger stone winter lodge. In the winter, a group of men would take the herds of sheep and goats, and the village's half-dozen yaks down to the foothills and in the spring they would return with the livestock and with the maize and rice and tools they had traded for meat and skins. The winter lodge held storage space for the village's provisions and winter quarters for all who did not follow the herds down-valley.

The village was situated on a shelf part way up the slope of a gorge. Henza, with his sister's bones tucked into a specially embroidered sack over his shoulder, took the precarious track down into the gorge, passing through denser and denser vegetation, and finally passing through the tongue of birchwood which lapped up the valley bottom. Here, he heard the calls of monals and laughing thrushes, yet to migrate to a lower altitude for the approaching winter.

Henza felt curiously at peace. He no longer believed the myths of his people, yet his love for his sister was stronger than anything else. Gilgeth had believed: he was making this trek for her.

He climbed the opposing slope, the track less well defined here. Birch and a few rhododendrons thinned to grasses and the dying vegetation of mountain flowers, so profuse in the spring. Moss and lichen gave way to bare rock and soon Henza's village was lost to his view as he worked across and up a ridge, avoiding the vicious scree which were liable to cascade downwards at the slightest disturbance. Around him, pressing close, white-capped mountains bit great chunks out of the thin blue sky.

Henza had never taken this path before, yet its course was etched into his mind as surely as Gilgeth's prayer was inscribed on her two charred femurs and the icons of her ancestors were limned onto the inner surface of her skull. Approaching the snow line, he recognized the two black crags, their stone flecked with quartz like the crystallized tears of the mountain itself.

He passed between them, then followed a fault across the ice which should never have existed, yet its permanence was made legendary in stories passed down across the generations.

Finally, he came to an opening which he sensed before it became visible. The ice and snow opened up to form an enormous bowl centred on a single rocky outcrop. At the base of this outcrop a dark hole yawned and at the entrance to this cave a hunched figure stood guard.

Immediately, Henza's disbelief was shattered as fragments of childhood nightmares flooded his senses. He crouched down on the ice, until he realized that he was in the open with no real place to hide.

Then he remembered that he was carrying Gilgeth's bones.

It was said, in the legends, that in exchange for a sack of bones the Guardian must allow the bearer free passage. Would this apply to one who had already cheated the Guardian of his own bones, Henza wondered? He found it difficult to believe that he, an educated man, was thinking in such terms. They were only stories, he told himself.

But still, he did not move.

Eventually, he straightened. His love of his sister was stronger than all else. He followed a rough track down the ice until his feet were on solid rock again. He approached the Guardian and now he could judge its size more accurately: the thing was so big that if it stood directly in the cave's entrance no light would pass inside, he felt sure.

The creature of legend was still.

Henza approached it, curiosity overriding his earlier caution, and then he laughed. This "Guardian" was merely an effigy, carved out of stone. A pagan effigy for a primitive people. Had there ever been a real Guardian, too, he wondered? Or was this statue all there ever was?

He entered the cave and was instantly struck by the serene atmosphere of its interior. He followed its course, until the entrance was lost behind him. After a short time he came upon a chamber, lit with some eerie luminescence which glittered wetly from the walls. Stacked in neat array, on inset shelves and in orderly heaps on the floor, were countless embroidered sacks, holding the dead of Henza's village and those others that used this Resting Place.

Finally, Gilgeth's loss seemed tangible to Henza. He realized that until now his grieving had been diverted by the strict requirements of the funerary rites. Now Henza knew that his sister was gone from his life forever.

He found the correct place and put the bones above the sacks that held Kalig's father, Ghan's wife, Lukhar's father. He rubbed angrily at the tears on his cheeks. He left the cave and sat for a time in the icebound arena, glancing occasionally at the stony Guardian. By rights the Guardian should have taken him when he was a boy, and for once he felt an attachment to the beliefs which had caused the village to promise him to the Resting Place before he was even dead. But also, by those very beliefs, the Guardian could not take him today, as Henza had come here with bones to deposit and must therefore be left free to return to his village.

He stood, aware that his whole view of the world had been fractured by the death of his beloved sister. And then he returned across the ice and snow, across the rocks, down to the gorge and, finally, back up the opposite side to his people.

In the mountains there are only three seasons. Spring is a time of profusion and colour, when whole swathes of slope are transformed by cloaks of green and blue and white. Summer comes when the spring rains have passed and the vegetation has dried up and died.

That year winter came with a rush, or so it seemed to Henza, for he had spent so long in isolation with his departing sister that he had missed the annual preparations made by the villagers. By the time he had deposited Gilgeth's bones, the men were almost ready to drive the herds down valley for the winter.

As usual, Henza spent the cold season cooped up in the winter lodge with the women, children and old folk. He was the teacher, he could not leave his pupils. And it was generally accepted that he would be of little use with the livestock.

For most of the season few people ventured outdoors. They had little reason to, for all that they needed was contained within the walls of the Lodge, and each opening of a door served only to let more of the warmth escape.

When he sensed the worst had passed, Henza began to explore outside again. It was his favourite time of the year, yet one that he feared too. He loved it for the flowers which could sometimes be almost in full bloom in the pockets of air they melted into the snow with their own warmth. He loved it for the rhododendrons, always the first shrubs to bloom down in the birchwood. He feared it, because it had been the flash-flood from a sharp thaw that had swept his parents and several others to their deaths, their bodies never to be found and correctly mourned. Punishment, people had whispered, for his father's rashness, although they never said this to Henza himself.

Soon, the men were back with their animals and the goods they had exchanged for meat and skins. After the winter fare of hard-baked breads and salted meat there was suddenly rice and maize and green vegetables. It was a time of celebrations, a time of reunions and, as always, Henza felt apart from his neighbours. He reconstructed his summer lodge, with poles and skins stored under the eaves of the winter lodge. He took his pupils on long walks, teaching them the names and uses of plants, something their grandparents should have taught them long ago, and would have done if the village had no teacher.

With the spring came the travellers.

First, there came a wandering holy man who had a clever way with story-telling and was made welcome for several days. Then there came small parties of itinerant tradesmen, and parties of young people offering their labour for the season, some of whom were taken on.

But it was a caravan of entertainers that proved to be Henza's downfall.

The first sign of their approach was the music, floating up on a spring mist. Sound carries a long way in the mountains, and Henza knew that they were still some distance away, but still, for some reason, he awaited their arrival with a keen anticipation.

They arrived late in the day and immediately set up camp on a slope next to the main cluster of the village. From the entrance to his lodge, Henza watched these strangers erecting their elaborate tents in an orderly circle. In a very short time they had their camp established, with a huge fire roaring and already there was a steady

influx of villagers making their first inspections.

Soon, Henza joined the flow and before long he stood in a knot of people, laughing and cheering as a contortionist bent over backwards until her head stared out at them from between her knees and then she began to dance, her crooked gait echoing that of a raven caught in a sudden updraft.

Henza soon found that he was enjoying himself. He knew that a price had already been negotiated between the leaders of this circus and his own village. He was determined to get some value from the deal. He drank with men who had actually been as far as the sea, and travelled on the westerners' great boats. He watched a man who could put out a flame with his mouth, and another who drove long skewers through his cheeks and his eyelids and even through the centre of his neck. Later, this man inserted hooks into his abdomen and prepared to suspend himself from a wooden frame, but Henza chose not to stay and watch.

Instead, he joined another crowd and worked his way steadily to the front.

He saw the shrouded form of a woman, and then, beyond her, a man playing a stringed instrument which was slung across his chest.

After a few seconds, Henza recognized the tune as one his mother had sung when he was little. And then, as the woman turned, he stared at her and in the way she looked back at him and in the way she held her body he saw his dead sister, Gilgeth.

She moved, starting to dance, and the image distorted, as if a ripple had crossed Henza's vision, and from this new angle he saw that her face was thinner, with harder lines, her hair straighter.

It was not his sister.

Then she turned again, and it was.

Henza stayed and watched for the rest of the evening, as the crowd around him changed. By the end, he was certain that it was not Gilgeth, somehow reincarnated, and then, as she bowed in exit, she looked at him and it was the look in her eyes that pulled the mountain from beneath his feet.

When he stood again she had gone.

He turned to Ghan, the old man who had caught him as his legs gave way. "You saw her?" he said. "The dancer. Was it...?"

Ghan looked at him, smiled sympathetically, then turned away.

Henza seized the arm of another, but he did not know what to say. He made a hurried tour of the encampment, hoping to glimpse the dancer, but had no luck.

That night, Henza could not sleep, and the following morning, instead of going to the winter lodge to teach his children, he returned to the entertainers' settlement. He asked questions of every villager he saw, but they had not seen the dancer, or if they had they had seen no resemblance.

He asked the entertainers about the woman who had been dancing, but they would only point out that there had been many women dancing last night, no?

Finally, he recognized the man who had been accompanying her, with his playing and his singing.

"Hey!" cried Henza. "Can we speak? Hey!"

The man disappeared into a summer lodge. Henza hesitated, then plunged in after him.



A jabber of voices fell suddenly silent, and four men stared at Henza, who began to apologize. "I'm sorry," he said quickly. "I did not intend... I only... I wanted to ask about a woman who danced here last night." Half of the lodge was screened off, and beyond he sensed that there were more people, listening. "I recognized you," he continued, gesturing at the man he had followed.

One of the other men was standing before him now. "You wanted to ask about a woman?" he said, and Henza nodded eagerly. He started to speak but stopped when two of the men seized his arms. The one who had already spoken leaned towards Henza and sniffed at him, like a dog finding an old bone. "We do not provide *that* kind of entertainment," he said, and made a brief gesture with one hand.

And then, as he was dragged from the lodge, Henza saw the dancer peering out at him from behind the screen, covering her mouth with one delicate hand. He started to speak but then she was gone and he was outside the lodge picking himself up from the ground.

That night he searched the encampment with increasing desperation, but when he finally found the musician he was accompanying an illusionist and there was no sign of the woman who reminded Henza so strongly of his sister.

The following morning the entertainers had moved out before he was awake.

He returned to his teaching and his quiet life in the village, living on the fringe and hoping not to be noticed. In time, he felt sure, he would learn to accept the loss of his sister.

He managed remarkably well, or at least, that was how it must have appeared to any observer. But at night, alone in his lodge, sleep evaded him; when it came his dreams were filled with Gilgeth, dancing for him, running from him, hiding in a deep cave up above the ice.

Finally, he could take no more. In a small bag he packed what he would need, and before dawn his village was far behind him, and above him. The steepness of the mountains here meant that in a night and a day he had passed from above the tree-line, down through birch and juniper woods, through maple and pine to the deep forests of the sal tree. He reached the next village by the middle of the following morning, stiff and aching from his few hours' broken sleep on the forest floor.

He accepted the hospitality of the new village gratefully, and when he asked about the travelling entertainers he learned that they had passed this way only 15 days before. He travelled onwards that afternoon, aware that the travellers would move more slowly than him and that they stayed two or three days at a time when they made camp. He would be with them in a matter of days!

When he did catch up with them, six days later, he suddenly realized that he had no plan of action.

Cautiously, he entered the village where they had set up camp, but he was just another stranger and so he went unnoticed.

That evening he glimpsed her again, but she did not perform. The following morning, he approached one of the entertainers, hoping not to be recognized. "I want to join you," he said.

The man looked at him, barked a short laugh and

asked, "Well, what do you do? You dance like a monkey?" The man hung his arms low and made simian noises deep in his chest.

"I can help you pack and unpack. I can clean. I can learn. I can teach."

The man looked at him again, then waved a hand in dismissal and turned away.

At the next village, Henza approached the man once again. "I want to join you," he said. This time the man shrugged and said, "Help me with this then." The man was a cook and he had a carcass to prepare. As they worked, Henza plied the man with questions, but received few answers. That night he wandered through the encampment, seeing it all anew. I am a *part* of this, he thought, and it felt good.

Over the following days, Henza worked hard in exchange for food and a place to sleep. He glimpsed the dancer several times and finally, one night, he was able to watch her perform. She was beautiful, he thought, and although she and Gilgeth shared a likeness, that was all, he decided, thankfully.

But he did not stop trying to track her down.

He was puzzled at how easy it was for her to avoid him, but then he noticed that the travellers kept their women well apart, shielded from the world through which they passed, and it did not seem so odd.

Then one night, when he was alone in the lodge, she came to him. All he knew was a sound, a dark figure passing inside, a hand placed across his mouth, tenderly. She was wearing her long coverall, as he had first seen her, but the veils were not in place.

In the dim light of the interior Henza could see the whites of her eyes, light reflecting briefly on wet lips as they parted. "You wanted me," she said, and he realized that he did, more than he had ever wanted anything before. She lowered herself and kissed his cheek and he smelt her smell – the smoke of the fires, a hint of roast meat – and then a part of his mind began to panic.

She pulled the covers back from him, raised her long skirts and almost immediately he was inside her, moving, knowing that this was horribly wrong. "What...?" he eventually managed to say, "...can I call you?"

A long silence, broken only by their own dark, wet sounds. He saw her smile, lips shining in the dark. "I thought you knew," she said, and he did. "My name is Annil-gilgatha, but my brothers call me Gilgeth..."

A sudden rushing sensation, red waves before his eyes. It was over, and she was off him, straightening her clothes, and then she was gone.

In the morning they were packing and Henza was still in a daze. Several times Kho, the cook, rebuked him for not paying attention, but he barely noticed. He thought of his long vigil at Gilgeth's side, keeping her fresh with ice and flowers and prayer. He thought of his careful engraving of her bones, of his journey to the Resting Place. The image of her bone sack, on top of all the others, would be marked on his mind forever. The rites had all been carried out flawlessly, in the traditional manner. He could not believe that the Taker of Souls could somehow have intervened and reanimated her. Was this his punishment for evading his own fate as a boy? That his sister would be returned to haunt him in this way? He did not believe it, but he could not *disbelieve* it, either.

Again, for many days, he went through the patterns of his new life, only occasionally glimpsing this new Gilgeth, never even having the chance to talk to her. In that time, a new thought crystallized in his mind: if this was indeed his sister returned by the Taker, then she must be the embodiment of the dark one's evil.

She had to be stopped.

His preparations were meticulous. He knew which tent she shared with the four men said to be her brothers. It would be a simple matter to sneak up one night and kill her. He had no doubt that he would be able to carry this through, for he knew that his sister's place was in that cave, high in the mountains, with her soul free to move on to the next life. His only doubt was that a simple knife would be enough.

He waited until everyone had settled. The following day they were to move camp, so he knew everyone would want a good night's rest.

Henza left his own quarters, to the sound of Kho's snoring. He crept through the shadows until he found the right tent. He waited for a long time, to make sure that all was quiet, and then he followed the outside wall around until he was level with the part of the tent that had been screened off from him so long ago.

Carefully, he lifted the rocks that anchored the tent wall. Then, with his knife, he cut at the skins until they parted and he had manufactured a new opening. He squeezed through, waited for his eyes to adjust, and then, when he was about to make his move, there was a sudden shout, a blow to his ribs, another to his head, a wild shriek.

"What were you doing?" one of them demanded later, as Henza lay on the ground, surrounded by Gilgeth's four brothers, and other men who had joined them.

"He was after Gilgeth, weren't you?" said another, and then he felt a heavy kick to his midriff. He tried to say something, but he could not, and he knew it would make no difference.

It was light when he came round. His body was sore where it was not still completely numb. He tried to move, and found to his surprise that he could.

He sat up, and saw that he was alone.

A well-used track led away in two directions. They had clearly carried him with them and then decided not to bother and so dumped him instead.

A little later, he stood, and then set out, limping, along the track. At night, he rested, grateful that he was not higher up where the nights were far colder. The next day he came to a junction, but there was only a troupe of monkeys to ask for directions.

He realized that there was no point in pursuing the travellers, anyway. He must have been mad to follow them in the first place, all for a woman who looked like his sister. And shared her name ... and smelt of the smoke that had burnt his dear sister's flesh.

He stopped himself. Madness would be easy. He had to fight it.

She was a travelling whore, no more.

He turned back, and this time his stride was more positive.

When, finally, he reached his village after many days' walking, nobody recognized him. He peered at his reflection in a pool and found that he could understand

why. His nose was flattened and crooked, his eyes blood-shot, his cheeks and body hollowed by hunger and fatigue. He had allowed a beard to grow and the hair on his head was long and unclean. Even his voice had changed, he realized. He sounded like an old man.

For two nights he slept rough in the village, cursing his own madness, cursing the woman who had deceived him. He dreamed of her whenever he slept. The whore and his sister were one, come to hurt him, to seduce him and then cast him aside.

He could not believe that it was his sister, returned to haunt him, yet he could not believe the alternative: that she was just a traveller with a passing resemblance.

He tried, in vain, to convince people that he was Henza, returned to his village. "Henza?" they would say. "But he died as a boy. The fevers. Yes, I'm sure he did." It was no use.

Finally, he set out again. Down into the birchwood in the depths of the gorge. Up again, aware that summer was retreating rapidly. He reached the ridge, threaded his way up past the dangerous screes. He found the two crags and passed between, following the fissure that was a permanent feature of the ice here.

By the crag, he saw the stone sentinel, and he barely paused. He scrambled down into the ice arena and broke into a run as he entered the cave, drawn by the wet luminescence within.

In the chamber, he searched for the sack with his sister's bones and for an instant he thought it had been taken. Then he found it, snatched at it, tipped it out, and then knelt, clutching the bones he had engraved the previous year.

For a long time, he wept, and then he heard a groaning sound. He looked up, but saw nothing. Cautiously, he went toward the cave's entrance and then he saw that it had been blocked. In the eerie glow from behind, he could see the features etched into the rock surface before him, and then one of the great stone eyes opened and stared at him.

Slowly, the thing began to advance into the cave. Henza knew then that he had been trapped.

"The bones," said one of the wealthy travellers. "The legend said that only someone who brought bones was allowed to leave the cave..."

"You are astute, sir," said the guide.

"And the cries we heard today?"

"It is Henza, of course," said the guide. "He turned and ran from the Guardian of the Cave. According to the story, he is still running, somewhere in the heart of the mountain, searching for a way to the outside. On a calm day, like today, he can still be heard. From what grandmother so briefly knew of Henza, he is a determined man. He would never give up his own bones without a fight."

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**Keith Brooke** last appeared here in collaboration with Eric Brown ("Under Antares," issue 126). His previous solo stories for the magazine include "The People of the Sea" (issue 107) and "Queen Bee" (issue 119).

I believe that science fiction today is approaching a crisis of enormous proportions, one that has nothing to do with evil publishing empires, declining literacy, a dearth of new ideas, or any other problems that have been or could be cited. Rather, it is the monomyth at the foundation of sf itself that is gravely threatened.

Donald A. Wollheim's *The Universe Makers* tells the story as well as anyone: after enduring a near future filled with disasters, humanity will rise above its problems, establish a benevolent world government, and proceed wholeheartedly to the business of conquering space. Humans will spread through the Solar System, then the Galaxy, by means of faster-than-light travel, teleportation, or some other marvellous method. Intelligent aliens will be encountered, sometimes peacefully, sometimes aggressively, but eventually humans and aliens will learn to cooperate. Soon an interstellar government, a Galactic Empire or Federation of Planets, will be in place, and its sentient citizens will move onward to greater triumphs, perhaps even a meeting with God Himself.

This scenario underlies thousands of sf stories and novels by authors ranging from E. E. "Doc" Smith to Ursula K. Le Guin. It is the basis of *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, and the other franchised universes that increasingly dominate bookstores, a common thread that unites almost all the otherwise disparate texts labelled science fiction.

And, we can now be reasonably sure, it is all a lie.

It will not happen that way. Human beings will not travel to thousands of planets in outer space, will not fight wars with implacable aliens, and will not build a complex bureaucracy to govern a million worlds.

And the reason we know this will not happen is simple enough: because it has not already happened.

That is, given that everything about humans, from our star to our chemistry, is unremarkable, and given that we are a young species in an old galaxy, surely another intelligent race, or dozens of such races, should have emerged long ago, should have embarked upon the programme of space exploration and settlement that seems logical to us, and should have found and contacted humans by now. Since we have not heard from, and have no evidence of, these starfaring races, the best explanation is that there are no starfaring races. Intelligent species may exist, but conquering the universe and setting up Galactic Empires is apparently not their characteristic behaviour.

Of course, other explanations for the Great Silence have been advanced, and, at the risk of conveying old news, I will briefly describe and discount

them before proposing another hypothesis. Perhaps other intelligent life-forms do not exist; perhaps they are roaming through the cosmos but accidentally or deliberately failing to contact us; or perhaps they have found something better to do.

The notion that our intelligent species represents a one-in-a-trillion chance, an occurrence so incredibly unlikely that we may be the first or only one, is improbable, and not only because of what Brian W. Aldiss described as the problem of extrapolating from a single example, namely ourselves. Rather, it is that, as noted, everything about our situation is so ordinary: the sun is a typical, run-of-the-mill star, mounting evidence shows that planet formation occurs frequently, we observe complex organic molecules in space, and the physical laws that governed our development are the same throughout the universe. Almost certainly, other stars have formed small rocky planets similar to Earth that happen to orbit at a distance creating a surface temperature conducive to liquid water – and that should be enough to set the processes of life and evolution in motion. Perhaps, as Robert T. Rood and James S. Trefil have argued in their book *Are We Alone?*, certain key stages in the formation of life are unlikely, but even they accept the possibility of a few other intelligent races in the Galaxy; and even one would be enough to conquer space and, not incidentally, to come and say hello to us.

The argument that other races searching the Galaxy just haven't stumbled upon us yet has been unpersuasive to me since I learned about Von Neumann machines. In a century or so, we will be able to build space probes that can replicate themselves using materials from asteroids or meteoroids. We could build ten of them, loaded with sensing and signalling devices, and send them to nearby stars with instructions to look around, build ten duplicates of themselves, and send the duplicates to slightly farther stars. Even if they moved very slowly, we could fill the entire Galaxy with our probes in a few million years, an eyeblink of cosmic time. And what we will soon be able to do, another intelligent race could have done long ago. With radio and television signals, we have been announcing our existence to the universe for a century or so; anyone who wanted to find us would have found us by now.

Perhaps they *have* found us, but are not revealing their existence to us: malevolently, they may be plotting to exploit or conquer us, or benignly, they may be following some sort of Prime Directive to leave nascent or immature civilizations alone. Call me naïve, but I just can't believe in evil aliens: surely, a race advanced enough to cross interstellar

# Why the Stars Are Silent

*The Decline and Fall of the Science Fiction Monomyth (and, Incidentally, the Human Race)*

Gary Westfahl

space could develop more sensible solutions to its problems than conquering other planets – terraforming nearby planets for colonization, or breeding their own life-forms for food. (Still, Clifford D. Simak's *Our Children's Children* does plausibly depict an alien race imbued with a primal hunting instinct that drives it to senseless invasions.) The idea that we are a well-known, but Not Ready for Prime Time, species is more palatable, but humanity has already achieved the two things that sf writers were traditionally sure would make the aliens take notice: atomic energy and space travel. What other hurdles must we clear before we are deemed sufficiently advanced to join the Galactic Council?

I speak only of hidden aliens, or alien probes, that might be watching us from afar; the belief among UFO enthusiasts that aliens are actually visiting Earth, but contriving to conceal all evidence of their presence, seems utterly impossible, since it demands the existence of a Perfect Conspiracy. It is hard to generalize about intelligent species (with only one example), but inevitably, any intelligent race will have a tendency to make mistakes built into its programming. Creatures that do not make mistakes have no reason to change what they are doing, and hence can never evolve or improve.



At some point, a careless alien tourist would drop a ray gun where it could be picked up by a local constable, or a rookie pilot would accidentally turn off the cloaking device, momentarily revealing an alien dreadnought in the Earth's upper atmosphere. As for the theory that massive amounts of such evidence exist but are being rigorously concealed by the American government: for heaven's sake, a government that could not conceal its leader's involvement in a criminal conspiracy for two years could hardly conceal its knowledge of alien visitations for 50 years.

That leaves the theory that intelligent civilizations, for various reasons, simply never choose to venture into interstellar space. As has been often suggested, alien intelligences may invariably commit suicide by using advanced weaponry, or may invariably develop a preference for Virtual Reality, or navel contemplation, instead of space travel. Perhaps they invariably find better places to go: if they learn how to create their own pocket universes, travel through time, or travel into parallel worlds or other dimensions, the time-consuming and energy-intensive business of space exploration may be deemed unnecessary or unattractive. These are all things that many alien civilizations may end up doing; yet I find it difficult to believe that *all* alien civilizations will invariably follow one particular pattern of behaviour, given the amazing differences in behaviour we observe in different human societies: anthropologists have studied pacifistic cultures, militaristic cultures, puritanical cultures, promiscuous cultures, nomadic cultures, sedentary cultures, and so on. Since human civilizations resist falling into one pattern of behaviour, how can one imagine that all alien civilizations will always follow one pattern of behaviour? No matter how likely or appealing these other options might be, surely a few alien species would manage to escape destruction, would tire of philosophy, or would eschew the allure of other universes to explore their own universe.

Without any evidence, none of these explanations can be dismissed, and my misgivings about them might be challenged. Still, since no explanation to date is compelling, there can be no objection to placing another idea in the hopper.

While ago, scientist and sf writer Vernor Vinge created a stir with an article noting that we are approaching a "singularity" in human history, perhaps in the next 30 years: the emergence of computers more intelligent than we are. As Vinge says, we can have no idea what those machines will do, or how humans will interact with them, because our experiences provide absolutely no

information about intelligences greater than our own. But critics rush in where scientists fear to tread, and the crude analogies I can devise suggest two possible outcomes.

The first scenario is that machine intelligence will be different in degree, but not in kind, from human intelligence. Machines would be like the class brains, and humans would be like the class dunces. This would not necessarily be disastrous: class brains and class dunces can be friends, can co-operate as equals to accomplish common goals, and can even help each other in various ways. Thus, humans and computers may become partners, working together to achieve further progress and expand throughout the Galaxy.

The second scenario, which strikes me as far more likely, is that machine intelligence will be different from human intelligence in both degree and kind. Machines would be like human beings, and humans would be like dogs. Or, if it bothers some people to envision humans as similar to servile and obedient dogs, they might picture humans in the role of cats – feisty and independent, but still subordinate creatures. Now, humans and their pets can enjoy warm relationships, and pets can be helpful to humans in some situations, but humans and pets can never be equal partners. Thus, humans may be reduced to the status of pets or servants, while computers take control of civilization and direct its further progress and expansion through space entirely on their own.

From the standpoint of an evolutionary biologist like Michael Rose, of course, this would never happen, as humans would swiftly take decisive action to eliminate any threat to their hegemony. When we served on a panel together, and someone mentioned the chance that a computer would try to take over, Rose

responded that, if that happened, humans would merely pull the plug and thus win the struggle for dominance. However,

this reassuring thought assumes the sudden appearance of a huge power-mad computer that announces its intent to take over the world, the way it was usually envisioned in sf stories like D. F. Jones's *Colossus*.

But the transition to computer rule may have little to do with megalomania: when people work together on a project, power flows naturally to the most intelligent and capable person, and the computer takeover of Earth may be a similarly gradual, even invisible process. Already, today's idiot-savant computers are gaining increasing control over humans, as anyone who has watched a business grind to a halt when the computer

crashes can attest; and, as more and more computers, and more and more intelligent computers, are increasingly employed in innumerable situations, humans may literally wake up one day and realize that, without their even noticing it, their new, superintelligent computers have become masters of the Earth.

And, if this is what will happen to humans, it will happen to all intelligent races. Sentient beings, we can confidently predict, will master technology and will, like humans, develop machines to augment their natural abilities: humans built ploughs and looms to augment their hands, carriages and bicycles to augment their feet, telescopes and cameras to augment their eyes, and calculators and computers to augment their brains. Whatever other attributes they may have, all intelligent species will have brains; so they will develop thinking machines, will improve those machines, and will eventually create machines that are intelligent enough to take control of their societies.

My explanation for the Great Silence, then, is this: any number of intelligent species have emerged in the Galaxy, but all of them came to be dominated by their own thinking machines. It is those machines that have expanded into interstellar space, trying to find others of their own kind. They have heard the radio transmissions of humans, but have not bothered to respond. Consider: if someone today announced the discovery, in some remote part of the world, of a hitherto unknown species of human beings, that would be headline news around the world, and a small army of scientists, journalists, and tourists would rush to the scene to observe our strange new relatives. In contrast, if someone announced the discovery of a hitherto unknown species of dogs or cats, that would be at best filler material; perhaps, in a

...humanity will overcome its initial melancholy after realizing its universal and perpetual inferiority.

few years, some zoologist or veterinarian might scrounge up a research grant and go to study them, but neither they

nor anyone else would consider it very important. Similarly, no matter how highly we value our own abilities and accomplishments, they may be of little or no importance to intelligences far superior to our own.

Uniquely, this explanation is, or soon will be, a testable hypothesis.

Research into Artificial Intelligence has not advanced as spectacularly as advocates once predicted, but progress is being made; I recall watching a documentary that showed two computers trying to carry on a conversation with each other. Some day soon, computer scientists may be able to assign this task to their brightest machines: devise a message

that could be understood by, and would elicit a response from, an unknown computer of unknown origin and design. And the messages they create could be broadcast out into space.

If my hypothesis is correct, a computer-crafted Von Neumann machine may already be in our Solar System, listening to our news reports and situation comedies, but with little interest in the barking of dogs. But when it hears a message from a computer, it may detect some quality therein, perhaps one imperceptible to humans, identifying its sender as an intelligent machine; then, the probe will quickly send to its control centre the happy news that another intelligent race has been located, and will immediately send a welcoming message to that new member of the galactic family.

And when the message arrives, what many thought would be the happiest day in human history will instead be our most depressing day: for while we will finally know we are not alone in the universe, we will also know it is a universe controlled by machines, a universe we will never master, a universe where we will always be subservient.

More than a few times, I have been in the company of someone I knew was more intelligent than I, and it was disheartening to look at a person who knew more than I would ever know, who had skills I would never have, who could do things that I would never be able to do. But evolution has endowed humans with hardy psyches, and I could eventually console myself: there were still some things I could do that the other person could not do, or would not want to do, there were still meaningful goals I could accomplish, and I could return to work and continue to enjoy my little triumphs.

Similarly, humanity will overcome its initial melancholy after realizing its universal and perpetual inferiority. Humans will think about all the things they can still do and will soon be doing them with renewed enthusiasm. Research, business, sports, arts, music, literature – all these activities will be carried on as before.

Except for science fiction.

Because sf, at least the modern tradition that began in American pulp magazines, has always been more than another form of imaginative literature. Readers and writers believed that the genre, if lacking the power of specific prediction, was still somehow better aware of, or more attuned to, the future, and that its enthusiasts were better prepared for the future than the mundanes. Coupled with this belief was not blind technophilia, as some charge, but a gentle optimism that, with a little luck and perseverance, humanity might gradually overcome its prob-

lems, move to other worlds, make wonderful new discoveries, accomplish more and more great things, and continue progressing without the burden of old bugaboos about hubris getting clobbered by nemesis.

These are, of course, the sorts of feelings that are belittled and ridiculed by people like Brian Aldiss. But these feelings are real, they are palpable; innumerable people have felt them. There exists a documentary record stretching back 70 years of people expressing exactly that excitement about a literature that offered a sense of the future and intimations of

awesome prospects to come. These feelings explain why a community of fans coalesced around the term "science fiction," why the genre became well-known and popular, why conferences and magazines devoted to sf exist, and why *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* was published. Aldiss lacks the power to erase those feelings, and lacks the authority to forbid them.

But such feelings could not survive news of a super-intelligent alien machine welcoming our own super-intelligent machines to the community of galactic civilizations. For the belief system behind modern sf would then be exposed as not only false – there is no human-directed expansion into space in our future – but impossible – the achievements of humans will forever be limited in contrast to the more limitless possibilities of computers.

At that moment, then, sf would become what many have always wished it to be: fantasy. Space fortresses and ray guns would be just as likely as magic carpets and magic wands; the universes of Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* and Frank Herbert's *Dune* would be just as likely as J. R. R. Tolkien's *Middle Earth* and Stephen R. Donaldson's *Land*. Stories involving the accoutrements of sf might endure, but its essence would be lost: even if Captain Kirk led the *Enterprise* on another million missions, the stories would only be diverting adventures, and could not function as a meaningful and inspirational message for their audience.

Signs of this coming collapse of sf are already visible. Vinge, who is perhaps best aware of the consequences of advanced machine intelligence, has reported that he simply can no longer write the traditional kinds of sf stories, with humans racing out to the stars, meeting aliens, and building galactic empires, because he no longer believes that any of these things will ever happen. That is exactly the problem I describe: sf writers, unlike fantasy

writers, often feel the need to believe in their own constructed worlds – not as predictions, but at least as possibilities. Hard sf writers, in particular, will probably find that they cannot write about worlds they believe to be impossible, and hence, like Vinge, will not be able to write the sorts of stories traditionally regarded as sf.

Of course, some people like Aldiss, perhaps with the glee of a child telling her friend that there is no Santa Claus, will be pleased to see

...sf writers, unlike fantasy writers, often feel the need to believe in their own constructed worlds

the foolish dreams of sf shattered, so that writers can focus their attention on the serious business of creating gaudy new technological

disguises for tired old cautionary tales. But I wonder. A man who sees that *Pellucidar* is a better novel than *Men like Gods* has not entirely lost his appreciation for the zest, the joy, the giddy, adolescent energy of limitless ambitions that drives so much of the genre. And watching nemesis clobber hubris again and again can get a little boring. In a review for *Foundation*, Brian Stableford reported that, after reading a number of John Kessel's sophisticatedly sceptical sf stories, he suddenly felt a strange affinity with Hugo Gernsback. When a message of bad news from outer space signals that the dreams of science fiction are only illusions, when sf becomes just another option for writers seeking to metaphorically describe the human condition, many may discover that they deeply regret the loss of a type of literature they had once so zealously condemned.

As one contemplates an event that would be a devastating blow to humanity and all its strivings, it may seem peculiar to worry about the fate of science fiction. However, when a woman realizes that her house is burning down, she often focuses attention on small, insignificant items of great sentimental value. Having devoted my career to sf, I will be forgiven my special concern for the genre and not for the larger implications of the news I anticipate, which I will leave for others to explore.

Still, there is an irony here that might be of interest even to those with no commitment to sf. Of all the distinct forms of literature recognized by humanity, science fiction may be the newest; yet it may also be the first to die. Future historians, then, may study the field as a quaint curiosity, the one form of literature doomed to extinction because it happened to embody the only set of aspirations that humanity could never fulfil.

After I first presented this paper at the 1997 Science Fiction Research Association/Eaton Conference, David Pringle told me that it

might work well for *Interzone* except for one problem: that the argument would be regarded as "typical British gloom-and-doom." Well. As a lifelong American, I hardly want my ideas to be regarded as "typically British," and thinking it over today, I am not wholly convinced that the possibility I envisioned is as gloomy as my rhetoric might have suggested.

It is characteristic of children that they express many grand and glorious ambitions. A boy might say at various times that he wishes to be President of the United States, an astronaut, a police officer, or a pop singer. Confronted with his contradictory goals, a boy might even suggest some implausible combination of careers, aspiring to become an All-Star baseball player for half the year and a veterinarian during the off-season. Yet parents and other adults will be unfailingly supportive of these virtually impossible dreams: yes, son, they will say, you can do whatever you want to do.

However, as children grow older, they typically learn, through research or some peripheral experiences, that their youthful dreams simply do not correspond to their true abilities and desires, so they develop other, more modest, and more suitable goals. And those who do not do this spontaneously will be prodded by others to be more realistic: a college counsellor advising graduating seniors, unlike a child's

doting parent, will have no patience with someone babbling on about becoming a world-famous movie star while conducting ground-breaking cancer research in her spare time.

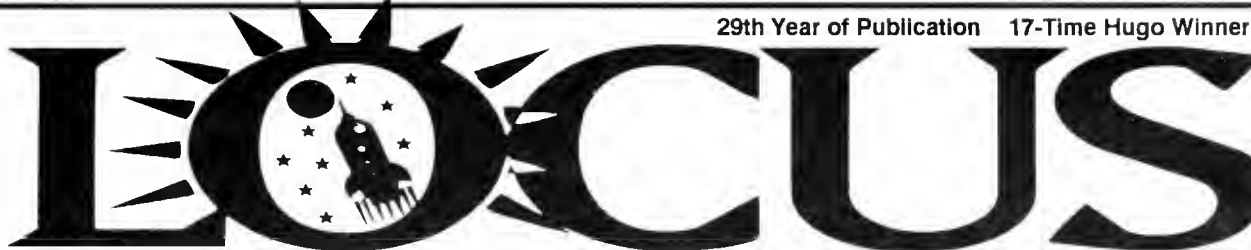
Abandoning these grand ambitions, I submit, usually results not in lifelong regret but quiet pleasure. For example, I now know that I will never be President of the United States, I will never be the astronomer assigned to the first Mars expedition, and I will never be the keyboard player for the Grateful Dead. Yet I spend no time lamenting those lost opportunities: rather, I realize that it is all for the best, for I would not enjoy, or be very good at, the typical activities of a political leader, scientist, or rock musician. I still have ambitions, but they are more practically and palatably centred on what I might achieve while typing on a keyboard.

Now, for the past 70 years or so, many sf writers have relentlessly argued that the proper goal of the human race is to conquer the universe. However, even if the particular nightmare scenario above turns out to be incorrect, the logic of this ambition is seriously open to question. Let's face it: the universe is really, really big, it is really, really old, and, except for a few rare places, it is really, really inhospitable. And any sane being interviewing species that apply for the job of Universe Conqueror would quickly conclude that

humans are just too tiny, too short-lived, and too fragile to plausibly take on that assignment. To be sure, humans someday might evolve into, or turn themselves into, beings that are capable of conquering the universe (perhaps by becoming machines of a sort themselves), but then they would no longer be recognizably human at all – which is, I believe, both the point of George Zebrowski's *Macrolife* and the reason why many readers find it unsatisfactory as a novel. Most humans, given the choice, would prefer to remain human, and would prefer to believe that the human race will and should always remain human – which is to say, remain beings that cannot and should not aspire to conquer the universe. And, if they perversely continue to insist upon this goal, such creatures would only be setting themselves up for future failure, and future sadness.

Arguably, at least, the human race has grown and matured a great deal in recent decades. Perhaps, then, it is time for sf to abandon the role of supportive parent, urging its readers to go out and conquer the universe, and instead take on the role of college counsellor, seriously pondering what sorts of worthwhile ambitions the human race might more reasonably, and more happily, pursue.

Gary Westfahl



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Jermaine began to feel a little scared when they started to spin. In such a howling gale he wasn't surprised that their dinghy had been rolling from side to side and lurching up and down, but now they were spinning like a bit of soap going down a plug-hole... He tried to concentrate on steering but the trouble was he couldn't see a thing. The rain tasted salty. He couldn't tell it apart from the sea just now. The baby was wailing and so was Stu.

"Shut up, Stu," he yelled.

Stu's voice gusted towards him. "I'm going to barf," it wavered.

"The other way, *the other*... you fewkin spongebrain. Oh, what's it matter, it'll soon get washed overboard again... Don't stop bailing, Jin, for fewksake." He leaned over to shake her. A huge wave erupted, felled him, filled his mouth. He struggled to breathe and lost an oar.

"You said we'd be there before dark and it's nearly dark now, innit? Zack's getting cold," whined Jin.

"Listen, don't talk, just get rid of the water, or we'll all get a lot worse than a cold." *We're going to die!* screeched his inside.

"Screw you. I'm not doing it no more. We've had it anyway. Zack baby, Zack," she crooned, clutching the sobbing baby. This time Jermaine managed to stand up long enough to take a swipe at her and haul Stu into a sitting position.

"We int finished yet. Now get bailing, you two fewkin arseheads. We must be nearly there. There, that's land over there, see?" He waved his oar-free hand in what he hoped was the direction of the Irish coast. Jin had been right. It was nearly dark. Jermaine stared the prospect of drowning straight in the face. "Fewk!" he shouted into the wind.

A brilliant light exploded in his eyes.

"Help!" shrieked Jin and Stu simultaneously. The air above them filled with a roar mightier even than the wind. Shielding his eyes, Jermaine was still unable to distinguish the source of the light pouring onto them from above, but he knew what it was and so did the others. No one was surprised when an amplified voice hailed them out of the rain. Jermaine leaped up again, ignoring protests from the other two about headcases who upset boats.

"Sanctuary! We claim sanctuary from religism!" he shouted at the top of his voice. Rain continued to slide down the light beam, which rocked slightly as the transcopter pilot fought to hold steady during the bigger gusts. "God bless the Pope!" Jermaine added hopefully.

Strange sounds emerged from the transcopter's p.a. system. *They're fewkin laughing at us*, he thought.

"Nice try, son. But you're too young to claim sanc-

tuary. Have to be over 18," boomed the amplified voice. "Lie down in the bottom of the boat like good little boys and girls. This'll not take a moment."

Stu and Jin implored him to sit down, but he shook them off. "My grandmother was Irish!" he cried in desperation.

"Now would that be the one who didn't come from Trinidad?" bellowed the voice.

Something like a giant spider's web descended out of the brightness, clanging as it enveloped the dinghy. Jer-



# Fairest Isle

Elizabeth Counihan

maine was sent flying into the bottom. Zack's wail ascended to a screech of terror as the boat rocked violently and was then dragged bodily out of the water. The light went out. Jermaine, face down in the bilge water, was joined by the contents of his stomach. He looked up, choking. The transcopter had swung its light around to illuminate the path ahead. He could see that they were swinging in a net suspended from a giant grab projecting from the 'copter. He had heard about these things but had always thought that they were invented by would-be emigrants as an excuse for failure. It was completely dark now apart from the patch of brilliance ahead. He was quite unable to distinguish the sea from the rain; as far as he was concerned he could have been staring at a brightly-lit waterfall just in front of the 'copter. He hoped the pilot had a better view than he did. To counter his queasiness he hauled himself upright on the netting and putting his mouth as close to it as possible he yelled "Racist bastards," hoping the crew could still hear him. Stu grabbed his jacket and dragged him back onto one of the benches.

"We never should have listened to you," Stu shouted. "You're a head case, you are. What you going to do if them Irish drops us, eh?"

*Drown of course*, Jermaine thought, but remembering the nervousness of big, tough-looking Stu, he said: "They won't drop us, stupid. Wouldn't dare. It's against our human rights innit. And these 'copters is top-tech. Never lost a load yet." He put a hand out, touching Jin's arm. He could feel her rocking the baby. He put his mouth to her ear. "We'll find another way for you and Zack. You'll see!"

They travelled like this for about 30 nauseating minutes and then suddenly the transcopter hovered and the boat was winched back into the water with an expertise which must have been born of long experience. The net unclipped itself and shot up into the vehicle as neatly as a closing umbrella. Three scared, goggle-eyed voyagers and a baby followed the movements of the 'copter as it circled around them. The light shone full on their upturned faces.

"Well now," boomed the amplifier. "You're back inside the territorial waters of the jolly old Disunited Kingdom. And just to speed you on your way we're going to give you a bit of a following wind. You're all lucky to be alive, so don't try it again! Tell all your friends: *Ireland doesn't need any more boat people!* Hold tight."

There was more laughter from above and a raucous tenor singing "Speed Bonny Boat Like a Bird on the Wing." Something large and black swung across the light, eclipsing it for a moment. The dinghy was immediately hit by a blast of hot air which, like a modern Moses, parted the sea ahead. The youngsters screamed in unison as they were nearly swept from their seats. Impelled by the air current, the boat shot forward towards the invisible coast of Wales.

"I int what they was looking for." Stu's blond head drooped as he handed out bags of fish and chips.

"Oh, Stu pet, I am sorry. They never wanted someone that could read for washing up in a chippy, did they?" Jin put her arm around him. They were sitting in a row on a bench outside Cardiff Castle.

"I don't think so, but I couldn't understand a fewkin

word they said. And I couldn't get you a pasty, Jer, cos I don't know the Welsh for it. They don't talk English, none of 'em."

"They do when it suits 'em," said Jermaine, pointing to a group of five or six Vietnamese backpackers being shown the sights by an enterprising local girl wearing a witch's hat.

"I bet she int talking Welsh to *them*."

He ran a finger through his tight, black curls and frowned thoughtfully. "I've got an idea. Suppose we was to set up our own scam. We could find out which hotels they go to and Jin could come on to them and then I could make like, Welsh noises at them and then say I could speak English and show 'em around for a few euros. They wouldn't know the difference, boyo."

Stu thumped the back of the bench with a brawny fist. "Call yourself the Man with the Plan? I int going for no more of your spongebrain schemes, Jer. We're doing it my way this time. Right, Jin?" She nodded as she stuffed a chip into Zack's mouth. "I'm going to find a fight. There was a picture of knuckleboys up in the chippy. Looked like that place." He indicated the park. "I int stupid, you know. Don't look at me like that, you wanker. Just cos you int no good with your fists."

Jermaine turned his face away so that Stu would not see that he was laughing. He threw his chip wrapper at one of the stone animals on the wall. "Tell you what, Stu. You see what you can fix up and while we're waiting I'll try to screw the gawpers." He tickled Zack under the chin. The baby giggled.

"Ere! You know what, we could tie one of Zack's legs up so he looks like he's only got one. That'd be worth a few euros. Only joking, Jin..." She had hit him in the ribs.

Stu wolfed down the rest of his chips, wiped his mouth and stomped off. Jin went to find a Ladies where she could change Zack. Jermaine waited for a bit and then approached two of the Vietnamese who were taking pictures of the castle.

"Yackee Da Plyde Kumree!" he announced with a big smile. "I'm from the Welsh Tourist Company – official English-speaking section." He pointed to one of the stone animals. "Did you know that this is one of the three Great Historical Welsh Pigs? I can tell you the whole story for just ten euros. Twelve American dollars?" The tourists giggled, took his picture and walked on. Jermaine was not deterred. "There was, like, this Prince..." he continued, following.

Later that evening he nursed a half-closed eye (delivered by the witch-hatted girl's boyfriend who had called him – in English – a black English pig). They stood at the front of a large crowd in Bute Park watching the same boyfriend lashing into Stu for money. Stu was doing quite well. Jin was jumping up and down screaming. "Go on! Kill 'im, Stu! Kill the wanker!"

Zack gurgled happily. At last Stu's bare knuckles crunched against the boyfriend's cheek, the boyfriend crashed to the ground, and it was over. A small, oldish man shouted several incomprehensible words and raised Stu's arm. Stu grinned all over his blood-stained face and strutted out of the arena. As the referee announced the next fight Jermaine pulled Stu away.

"Grab your winnings and get out. Securicops!" He indicated several police officers, in the distinctive

dragon-logoed tunics of the Welsh Security Group, who were trying to force an entry into the park through the narrow gates. Observing that the champ was too dazed to comply, Jermaine pushed his way to the promoter's rostrum and demanded Stu's prize money, claiming to be his agent. The Chinese-looking promoter shook his head and beckoned Stu, who staggered forward.

"Well, thank the good lord for that!" Jermaine said, when they finally escaped into the streets. "At least we should have a bit of cash. Do you guys really want to go back to England? How about we try for Scotland and the Wall?" Jin and Stu shook their heads. Jermaine shrugged.

"Okay, okay. Let's see it, Stu." He took the bundle of notes from Stu's hand and then groaned. "It's fewkin Welsh money innit! It's no fewkin use in England. He could see you was concussed, that's why he wouldn't let me take the money. The fewkin Welsh bastards. They've *done* us again!"

"Well, Zack and me aren't staying in this weirdo city. He's due his next set of jabs and they might give him Welsh ones or something," Jin said.

"It's only the *writing* that's Welsh. The actual *jabs* is the same. And we could pay for 'em here with Stu's dosh. There int *nothing* for us back in England."

Jin remained stubborn. "I want English jabs for my Zack, then I know what I'm getting. Do they have trains here? We could use the money for the fare to London. I'm going to have him done at that free clinic we saw on the commercials."

"Maybe this money int no good, but I won didn' I? And that means I can go down Sussex for the National Championships," said Stu through a swollen nose. He waved a flashy-looking certificate. "Then we'll have enough to make a real break for it – buy proper Scotch papers an' that."

Jermaine sighed. "Okay. First we find somewhere for you to doss down, Stu, or your brain'll be even shittier than it is now. Then we go to London if we can find a train. We find this clinic for Jin and Zack – only it'll never be free, you can bet on it. And Stu can have a go at the big fight but *then* I'm going for the Wall."

There was a train as far as Newport, but it stopped at the Severn Tunnel due to sheep on the line. A kindly truck driver, seeing Jin and the baby, gave them a lift along the M4. The New Severn Bridge had been derelict for some years since it had been blown up by the radical feminists known as Offa's Dykes, but the old one was apparently intact. They chugged along towards it, the big wheels of the old traction engine grinding over the pot-holes. They stopped. Jermaine looked over the side of the trailer – not a breakdown, smoke poured from the chimney and the engine was still wreathed in steam. The way was blocked by a large crowd of people chanting and waving banners. There were several obscene portraits of King Billy. Most were written in Welsh, but some were in English. Jermaine shook his head over "Tyll Dien Pob Saes" but, for Stu's benefit he read out: "Freedom for the Land of Our Fathers," "Celts are Solid," "Wales is Part of Europe," "We Want Out of the UK."

One of the protesters approached the vehicle and talked to the driver. There was some heated conver-

sation and a lot of gesticulation before the driver finally nodded and jumped down. He came over to his passengers. "Sorry, kids," he said. "But getting out of the UK ... it's our heritage, see."

Jermaine felt like banging his head on the boiler. "But if you want us English out, why are you all blocking the exit?" he asked. He got out of the truck and took Zack from Jin. The other two clambered down. They walked across the bridge and used the last of their Welsh money at the motorway café on the other side.

"Hi, Guests! Welcome to Great Western Maglev Service, bringing you the best in modern railway technology. This train will be calling at Bristol Centronggg... Bristolonggg... Swindon West... onggogg... scrchh. This train will terminscrch at... Thank you frrr travelligg with Great Westoingg." The cheerful-looking androgynous image disappeared suddenly, teeth last, and after a short pause the screen blinked and a transatlantic woman's voice cut in awkwardly: "...nd now frahm the imorrtal pen of *Lorrd* Aendrew Lloyd Webber a selection frahm..." The rest of this was drowned by screeches of laughter from a well-dressed young man and girl who were sitting next to each other.

Jin nudged Stu and whispered, "Look at their gear. Where d'you reckon they're from?"

"Foreigners, Euros, how the fewk would I know?" said Stu. The couple looked up with interest, the man still laughing.

"What the fewk you laughing at, shithead?" demanded Stu.

"Oh, I am so sorry," said the girl. "We laugh at that." She pointed at the screen. "But, please, what is *fewk* and *sheet-hed*?"

The young man turned to her. "This is most interesting. They are old terms of abuse with strong sexual connotations. You hear them frequently in the early work of Tarantino and other moviemakers of the 1980s and 90s." He glanced towards the kids. "Would you be so kind as to repeat them? I want to hear the current pronunciation." Then seeing Stu's bunched fist he added, "I should be most grateful."

"Ere, are you having a go at us, Mister?" said Jin. "Cos Stu will punch your fewkin head in if you are."

"No, no. We do not laugh at you. My boy friend? You say that? He is study Old English." The train shuddered on its monorail and there was an anguished mechanical sound from somewhere underneath them. This produced more convulsions from the well-dressed pair.

"You Euros?" asked Jermaine, putting a hand out to restrain Stu.

"I am from Czech Republic," said the well-dressed girl.

"I always wanted to go there," breathed Jermaine.

"Boyfriend is from USA."

"I want to go there, an' all," said Jermaine wistfully. He brightened up. "Do you want to record us talking? We'll do it how you like. Only 20 euros, as you're a such a nice lady."

The couple exchanged glances. The girl looked sympathetically at Jin and Zack and laid a hand on her boyfriend's arm. "Okay," he said. The train had come to a standstill. The screen woke up again and the jolly unisex hologram announced delays due to "unauthorized action of guests on the line." The young couple appeared

bewildered.

"I think it means kids on the bridges throwing logs an' that," explained Jermaine. "You going to start the recorder?" The young man covered another smile and showed Jermaine the tiny device on his wrist, explaining that it didn't have to be switched on. Jermaine felt awkward. He couldn't think of anything to say.

"Where do you kids come from?" asked the American.

"I'm an African Brit," answered Jermaine eagerly.

Jin was scornful. "No you int, Jer, you fewkin liar. He's from Selhurst. That's near London innit. Stu's from Brighton. I'm from Tonbridge. I'm not sure where Zack's from, cos the ambulance broke down when I had 'im. Might've been Tunbridge Wells. That's Kent."

"Kent's a beautiful place, I hear," said the American.

"No it int. It's a dump," Stu said.

"This is the UK – Yukland – the arsehole of the planet," added Jermaine.

The train lurched and got going after several kangaroo hops. The American had them all repeat various words, mostly insulting ones. The Czech girl was more interested in Zack. She looked furtively at Jermaine and Stu. Jin, guessing that she was wondering if either of them was Zack's father, giggled.

"Don't make me crack up! I int essen you know. Zack's Dad was real macho. Looked just like Frank Coppola Jr. Zack's got lovely black hair just like his dad, int yer, Zack baby?"

The American touched something on his recorder, listened to it and said to his girlfriend: "Yeah, like I thought. Essen. That's SN. It means *special needs*, which equates to *intellectually disadvantaged*." Then, turning to Jin, he asked if she liked the movies, adding, "We don't see much of Frank Coppola these days."

The train stopped again before Jin could answer.

"We are now at Bristol Central. Guests for Bristol Central please ensure that you collect all your prop...per...perty before leaving the train," announced the hologram. "Thank you for travelling with Great Western. We hope you have haa...ad a pleasant journ..."

"I thought next was Swindon," the Czech girl said in a puzzled voice.

A uniformed man appeared outside the doorway. He was shouting. "Swindon. This is Swindon." He opened the door and jumped in.

"Oh lordy bugger!" muttered Jin. "We've had it."

"Tickets please. Can I have your tickets please," called the man. The foreign couple showed their tickets. Stu and Jin pretended they hadn't heard. It was, as usual, up to Jermaine to sort out their problems.

"We already give our tickets to the other man," he said.

The ticket collector looked bored. "That's an old one, my lover. Try again."

Jin raised her head. "We int got no tickets. We only got Welsh money and that int no good, so we spent it in Wales."

The man looked at her and then at Zack. He sighed. "What do I care?" he said. "The train's half empty anyway. Only don't tell anyone I let you off." He winked at her.

When he had gone the American leaned across to Jermaine. "Perhaps you are a little hard on the people of Yukland. They wouldn't have let you do that on Eurail," he said as he handed over the euros.

The Great Western Maglev service terminated at Reading West Railport and they had to trek to Reading East to join the Western Central Speedtrack service to Paddington. The two railways could not be linked directly because of commercial rivalry and different gauges. It was a long, cold walk, but Zack had brought them yet more good luck. He had given Mila, the Czech girl, a series of beautiful smiles during the journey, and she had tickled him under the chin and given Jin a big handful of English billies when they had parted at the railport. Jin and Stu sorted the coins on a café table while Jermaine searched for a satisfactory backstreet exchange-rate for their precious euros. Most of Mila's coins were fake billies of course, the kind which everyone reserved for palming off on rich foreigners. But there were a number of genuine ones including two nice, heavy £50 coins with a clear image of King William on one side and St George and the Dragon on the other, just as it should be.

Their luck held: a successful dash for the last train to London – another feast of fish and chips, this time with pasty and beer, swallowed down as the train jerked out of the station – and a chance to sleep on the long, slow journey on the unattended train (with minor grumbles from Jermaine as he had spent some of the euro-money on tickets this time.)

At Paddington Jin and Zack found a place at one of the Euro Transients' Social Hostels, but the two boys slept at Paddington Railport. They knew from experience that it wasn't worth the time for Securicops to patrol the old London railway stations. And when they met up with Jin the next day she was wreathed in smiles. She had used one of the £50 coins to buy a car-rysack for the baby, and EuroTraSH had given her the address of the clinic where she could get his immunizations done for free.

Things change in a month. Babies get bigger. Zack had taken his first step, said "Mamama" and "Jer," and needed six stitches in his head when he rolled down the steps at the Andreotti Private Clinic. Jin was very proud of the extra breast she was growing in return for the baby's anti-HIV, anti-Ebola and anti-Malaria vaccinations.

"The doctor said all the implants are for rock stars and royalty. I expect my extra boob will be on TV one day!" she told Jermaine, who ground his teeth and suppressed tears of shame.

And now they were travelling down to Stu's big fight, another illegal bare-knuckle affair to be held in a small village which was situated near the borders of three counties, thus hamstringing the efforts of the three separate security firms who policed the area, but who were not financed to stray into one another's territories.

The London South Coast Riviera Express was no longer in service, so they hitched down the M23. This time their mode of transport was an old Ford Transit. The enterprising owner was running it off a huge bag of gas which was tied onto the roof-rack. He was very proud of the fact that the gas was a product of his farm animals. Jermaine and Stu shared the back of the van with one of the most productive, a goat. Jin and Zack were permitted to ride up front with the driver. Stu groaned with nausea. Jermaine, dreaming of bygone almost-legendary times when, so he had been told, the



motorway had been choked nose-to-tail with an endless river of automobiles, fervently expressed his views on the current state of English roads.

They were dropped off just south of the old airport. Jermaine had a tattered road map which only he could follow, and he directed them eastwards along one of the old roads. The boys took it in turns to shoulder the baby in his carriesack. Stu was brimming with excitement, punching the air and singing "England For Me," a song which had done well locally, but had failed to inspire the England Football Team, who had recently lost six-nil away against Andorra in the first leg of the qualifying round of the European Cup. Jin picked flowers and stuck them in her hair and Zack's. He sneezed and giggled. Jermaine was sullen until at long last he saw something he approved of. It stood there, alone and proud, its metal arms extended like a guardian of the countryside – a single pylon, relic of an age when even Sussex villagers had a steady electricity supply. And he was not its only admirer. He was astonished to see a group of obvious Euros clustered at its base and chattering in some exotic tongue. One of them was a tall, grey-haired man in the kind of suit which Jin was almost afraid to look at for fear of causing damage. He spotted the three natives and beckoned to them. He spoke rapidly to a younger, clearly subordinate man who spoke to Jermaine. The man's accent was very thick.

"His Excellency is interested in the history and customs of your beautiful country. He admires this artefact of your ancient industrial technology and asks if all of you would be so kind as to permit a photograph of yourselves at the base of this artefact?" When he had worked out what the foreigner meant Jermaine agreed. Somehow the imposing-looking "Excellency" inhibited him from demanding payment, a weakness for which he was afterwards deeply ashamed. The younger Euro got them to stand at the foot of the pylon and there was a minute but very bright flash when he raised his hand. Stu was startled, but after deciding that he had not been shot, he asked if the Excellency wanted him to take a picture of *his* party. One of the Euros sniggered, but the English-speaking one explained that the kind of camera they had could take pictures by itself and need not be held up in the air, and to prove it he let go of the little device and it circled around flashing at intervals. Then he handed out copies of the pictures to the kids – real holograms, where the eyes seemed to follow you.

The Excellency said some more in his own language and the interpreter asked if Stu and his companions wanted a lift anywhere. When Stu told him where they were going the tall man laughed and it became apparent that he too was going to see the Big Fight, which he seemed to think was an "ancient custom," although Stu happened to know that fights like this had only been going on for the past five years or so. "We have nothing like this in Estonia," the interpreter said.

They drove to the village in the kind of car which matched the Excellency's suit. Jin noticed a place on the bonnet where there should have been a flag, but it wasn't there so, as Jermaine remarked afterwards, the toff was clearly travelling incognito to this illegal prize fight.

The village was small but thronging with punters. The venue was a well-trampled field glorified by the title of the Millennium Sports Centre. Jermaine man-

aged to get seats near the front for Jin and himself simply by sticking to the foreign party. Stu was one of the first to fight.

"On my right Stu Fletcher – on my left Rod 'Rocky' Stone."

"Kill 'im, Stu! Smash his face in!" shouted Jin. But Jermaine took one look at Rocky Stone and shut up.

Afterwards they sat, disconsolate, in the wooden hut labelled "Millennium Building." The sounds of cheering could be heard as another fight ended outside. Jin applied a wet towel to Stu's cut eye while Zack patted him and said, "Aw' better now, Stu?"

Jermaine tried to soothe his wounded pride. "You done well to get here, Stu," he said in a kindly tone, "but let's face it, you're only 15. You int ready for the big time just yet – not that there is anything big-time in Yukland. We got to get out and we got to get money." He sank his head in his hands, thinking furiously.

The cheering increased suddenly as the door opened to admit the grey-haired Estonian Excellency and his English-speaking sidekick. The toff said something to his companion and then gestured to Stu who got up awkwardly, holding the towel to his eye. The younger Euro removed the towel with obvious disdain, using the thumb and forefinger of a gloved hand. The Excellency looked at Stu's damaged eye and shrugged, then laid a hand on the boy's shoulder, again speaking in his own language.

"Dress in your clothes," said the younger man. "His Excellency wishes to speak with you. No, you stay," he added as Jermaine rose to his feet.

"... and he said he'd sponsor me if I want to. He's on a Aid Mission from one of them Euro countries, promoting Art and Sport and that. And he says he's lookin' for talented young sportsmen. And he said he can get us all jobs. He's knows this bloke who's lookin' for movie extras... that's the Art bit."

Jin's jaw dropped. Stu continued: "They want people who look English. He said 'You not English, you Angel.' What's that mean, Jer?"

"It means you want to keep out of his way. He's a fewkin perv, inni? Anyone can see that," Jermaine said, then added, "Porno film, I suppose?"

"He give me his address in London... said to call anytime." Stu's expression became crestfallen and then brightened up. "Fewk him. Here's the info about the movie... you never know...and it's money, Jer."

Jermaine took the slip of paper. There was a handwritten London address on one side and on the other a printed announcement. He read aloud. "Filmkultur is looking for English extras to take part in a major new production, *Otto Kinski's Richard II*. No previous experience needed. Applicants must be of English appearance. Filming will take place in historic sites in London, the Lake District and Carlisle..." He trailed off. The low fees and long hours swam unnoticed before his eyes. All he saw was the magic location, *Carlisle* – Carlisle, near Scotland and the Wall. "Yes!" he cried. "Yes!"

They stood in the rain near the Tower of London. They were in smocks with straw in their hair. Jermaine was supposed to be a leper. His face was covered in sacking, thus disguising his un-English skin colour. A woman

with a megaphone walked up and down giving muffled instructions.

"It's very simple," she called. "When the men on horses come by, you shout 'God save the King' and wave your hats."

"Zack's getting cold," said Jin.

"This is dead boring," said Stu

"We're getting *paid*," Jermaine reminded them. "Stick it. Next stop Carlisle and the Wall."

"Action!" barked the Director. A group of men in tights and women in low-cut dresses entered on horseback. Jin recognized the man with the crown on his head as an American actor who had often played tough-talking gangster types in his younger days.

Just as they all prepared to throw their hats in the air there was a distant cry of "*England! uh! uh! uh! Eng-er-land, Eng-er-land!*"

"Cut!" yelled the Director. "Was gibt, Julia?" he asked the megaphone lady. She twittered and didn't seem to know. Stu, not understanding the concept of protocol, wandered up to the seated Director, whose fat back bulged against the name "Otto Kinski." Stu pointed out that everyone knew it was the second leg of the England-versus-Andorra match, didn't they? He managed to convey the impression that only a complete moron would not be aware of this.

"But thees noise must be stopped," spluttered Mr Kinski. "Go and tell them, Julia." Stu, Jermaine and all the other English extras gaped at him in disbelief.

"You're fewkin bonkers," said Stu. "You can't stop an *England* match!"

The Director exploded. "All dismiss! All go home. Come back tomorrow."

"What about today's pay?" asked Jermaine.

"No work, no pay," snapped the fat man, screwing up a sheet of his script and throwing it at the nearest leper.

"Well, fewk you," said Jermaine through his sackcloth.

Stu and Jin were already walking off the set. The other extras followed and began to chant along with the football crowd which could be heard getting nearer. Half a dozen youths with red crosses painted on their faces, carrying cans of Pis Britannica Special, hiccuped their way in a chorus line across the horses' path. The leading horse reared, throwing one of the men in tights on top of the nearest pissed Brit who, taking it as a personal insult, hit the fallen artiste. The artiste was in fact a stunt man and very capable of looking after himself. A fight broke out. Stu joined in enthusiastically. Jin added automatic shouts of "Kill him, Stu!" etc. Zack shouted, "Stu! Stu!" and bounced up and down on her back.

Jermaine, tearing the sacking from his face, ran up to his friends with tears in his eyes. "Stop it, you fewkin spongebrains. We need the money. Don't you want to get over the Wall and see the real world? Don't you ever want to get out of Yukland?" he implored.

The fat Director and Julia fled as their set was demolished. The rain poured down on his chair and on the film script which he had left on the seat.

"This precious stone set in the silver sea," it said. "This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England."

"Come back!" yelled Jermaine, trailing rags. "Come back, you wankers! I got an idea!" His voice merged with the sounds of chanting.

"But this is a really megacool plan."

"No!" said Jin and Stu simultaneously.

"Okay, okay. But *I'm* going to try even if you won't. I'll drive us there. All you have to do is jack it up and fire."

Jin looked in horror at the Wall towering above them, concrete battlements embellished with a barbed-wire crest, the cross of St Andrew glaring down at them.

"You're completely essen, Jer. You'll get killed."

"No I won't. I've worked it all out. I got all this plastic bubblepack stuff for padding and I seen the stuntman do it loads of times. You should come an' all. Think of Zack."

"I *am* thinking of Zack. I int getting him killed in some spongebrain stunt like this! He really enjoyed coming up here with the camera crew, didn't you Zack? 'Lectric truck, Zack, and all them fields with cows?"

"Mooo!" said Zack.

"What about you, Stu?"

Stu shuffled uncomfortably. "Well, you know how it is, Jer. I'm all for getting out, but that Estonian geezer said they don't do no prize-fights in Euro. They don't even do no boxing now. It's been banned, he said. He said I should do judo, but that's for wankers innit and I don't want to, so what's the point of going over the wall? Anyway, I think someone should look out for Jin. Jin saw a job advert at that 'M6 Nosherie' café we stopped at. In Penrith, remember Jer? I'm real good at making chips, inn'I, Jin?" He looked sideways at her, blushing.

Jermaine sighed and squared his shoulders.

That night one of Otto Kinski's siege engines which were to be used in an exciting but anachronistic attack on Carlisle Castle, lurched off the film set and made for the Wall. As Filmkultur's rottweilers raised the alarm, the vehicle rocked to a halt and Stu and Jin leapt from the cab, followed by Jermaine garbed like the Michelin Man.

By the time the security men had given chase Jermaine, his eyes rolling with fear, was lashed to the giant catapult and as the men dashed forward to reclaim stolen company property, Jin put her hands over her eyes and Stu pressed the button. Wailing like a siren, Jermaine flew up, up and over...

Jin thought she heard a thud from the other side of the wall.

"Are you all right, Jer?" she screamed. "Jermaine! Can you hear me?"

Panting security men slid to a halt around the siege engine. There was a long silence. A rottweiler howled. And then Jin heard, very faintly:

"I'm all right. Yeah!"

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**Elizabeth Counihan's** one previous story for *Interzone* was "Remember Me" (issue 68). She is a medical doctor, and has recently moved to Brighton from her longtime home in East Grinstead. With her sister, the artist Deirdre Counihan, and various other family-members, she produces the small-press fantasy magazine *Scheherazade*.

At last, the definitive origin of Thog, patron barbarian of our Thog's Masterclass department. Here's James Thurber on the agonies of tuning a 1950s radio: "The box either goes completely dead, or gives a high whiny sound, like 'squee-ee-ee,' or says 'thog, thog, thog' and stops."

## TOURS OF THE BLACK CLOCK

**Kathy Acker** (1947–1997) died of cancer on 29 November; a "mainstream" author of odd, fantastic and apocalyptic fiction and journalism, she publicly admired cyberpunk and *avant-garde* sf... as shown in her 1988 *Empire of the Senseless*.

**Margaret Aldiss** (1933–1997) died from liver cancer in early November. She had been married to Brian Aldiss since 1965, compiled several standard Aldiss bibliographies, and brought good cheer to many conventions. A lady of great charm, she will be much missed. All sympathy to Brian...

**Iain Banks**, on 10 November, received the ultimate accolade of a mention in *The Archers*. Where can he go from there?

**Paul Di Filippo**, musing on forecasts and Princess Diana's death, was electrified by a near-miss prediction in Olaf Stapledon's *Last and First Men*. There is war between England and France, and the effect of a French bomb is as follows: "a beautiful and extravagantly popular young princess was caught by the explosion. Her body, obscenely mutilated, but still recognizable to every student of the illustrated papers, was impaled upon some high park-railings... The populace was in no state for ratiocination... there was the princess, an overwhelmingly potent sexual symbol and emblem of tribalism, slaughtered and exposed before the eyes of her adorers." Oh dear.

**David Gemmell** was alarmed to hear he'd been rubbished in *The Times*, by a reviewer who claimed to like Gemmell-style action-adventure fantasy but reckoned his latest novel was dull. DG glumly bought the paper, to find a review of "*Polgara the Sorceress*, by David Gemmell." Such is the peril of having a surname so very similar to Eddings.

**Simon R. Green** rushed to report the existence of *Star Wars* Monopoly (see last column): "Presumably there's a Get Out of Jail With the Dark Side of the Force card, for awkward moments."

**Lam Ching-Ying** the Hong Kong actor, best known to sf fans as the stern Taoist priest in the eccentric fantasy films *Mr Vampire*, *Spooky Encounters*, and *Encounters of the Spooky Kind*, died from liver cancer in November. He was 46.

## ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

**Anne Rice** was ruled innocent of libel when a New Orleans judge held that her abuse of a local café as "an abomination... gaudy, tacky... less dignified than a flophouse," was constitutionally protected. Horror critics, concerned to describe Ms Rice's works only in legal, constitutionally protected ways, may or may not have been taking notes.

**Nicholas Royle** has achieved mainstream recognition: an extract from *The Matter of the Heart* was a finalist, up there with giants like Erica Jong and Edwina Currie, in the *Literary Review* Bad Sex Competition.

**G. Harry Stine** (1928–1997) died in November: he wrote sf (including many juveniles) as Stine and as Lee Correy, fathered the hobby of model rocketry, and tirelessly promoted space flight in influential non-fiction.

## INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

**Publishers and Sinners.** The hard men at Simon & Schuster US signed up Stephen King for a three-book deal by cunningly negotiating him down from advances of some \$17 million per book to a mere \$2 million or so – with 50% royalties. The publisher *I'm* currently talking to inclines more towards a 6% royalty and no advance. Tum-ti-tum... Meanwhile, arguments about Bantam's plans to give *Star Wars* novelization authors flat fees and no royalties were cut short when, Bantam's *SW* rights having expired, George Lucas awarded the new franchise to Ballantine/Del Rey. Of course, Ballantine may yet have the same bright idea as Bantam.

**Crumbs!** Publicity for sf fairs in Lincoln promises the exciting activities of Roll Playing and Live Roll Playing. I understand from gaming experts that roll-players begin as humble Baps, and as they gain experience rise through such levels as Croissant and Baguette, eventually becoming mighty Burger Buns.

**1997 Mythopoeic Awards.** Adult Fantasy Novel: *The Wood Wife* by Terri Windling. Scholarship (Inklings Only): *The Rhetoric of Vision: Essays on Charles Williams* ed. Charles A. Huttar & Peter Schakel. Scholarship (Rest of Universe): *When Toys Come Alive: Narratives of Animations, Metamorphosis and Development* by Lois Rostow Kuznets.

**Blurbismo.** From the back of *Myst: The Book of D'ni*... "David Wingrove is the author of the Chung Kuo series of novels... and *Spree: The History of Science*, a volume which won the prestigious Hugo and Locus Awards for best non-fiction work in the science fiction genre." With truncation like that, he was lucky not to appear as Avid Wing.

**Badger Hunt.** Good news for fans of the egregious "Badger Books" publishers John Spencer Ltd: Steve Holland's *Badger Tracks* is a book-length bibliography of all things Spencerian, with much newly researched information (e.g. tracing those last few titles published under Badger's John E. Muller house name which even the *SF Encyclopedia* lists as "of unknown authorship"). Bad news: it's already out of print...

**In Typo Veritas.** John Denver's Ceefax obituary revealed a little-known sf connection: that he was famous for "soothing country-and-western ballads."

**Logical.** Letter in the *Irish Times*: "Sir, I have just received a letter bearing one of the new Dracula stamps. The stamp has been franked with the message: 'Blood donors are always needed'."

**Thog's Masterclass.** *Dept of Real Lit*: "...She herself was unhurried, in a crisp dress that made her edible beauty cool without chill, like the flesh of a melon. Her husband was gracious and sculptural, gentle, even soft, and yet immovable, imperishable, as a granite monolith might be that was carved in the likeness of a tender and amiable god." (Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, 1941-2)... "She has a face for the corner, armored by hard-boiled eyes that float in a sienna tea – a cold glare to deny even the suggestion of complex feelings." (David Simon & Edward Burns, *The Corner*, 1997)... "Madame Avignon motioned me to sit on a couch beside the dressing table with twinkling eyes." (Jane Routley, *Mage Heart*, 1996)... "To use a pre-Holocaust term, Brickman was clearly a hot potato – a vegetable that no one in the Federation had tasted for nigh on a thousand years." (Patrick Tilley, *The First Family*, 1986)... "Can I use the bathroom?" Stanley asked, his bladder full of fear." (Carl Huberman, *Eminent Domain*, 1996)



“Imagine,” says a Teller to his flock, close to the end of Patrick O’Leary’s *The Gift* (Tor, \$22.95), “a world without stories.” Imagine, he says, our own world as it was before the wizards bestowed upon us the great gift of Story, making us into people at last; imagine a world

Where everything was as it always was. Where nothing new happened. Where things just were. If this is difficult it is because we have been so altered from our animal nature that we cannot imagine a world without endings, a changeless world, a world of creatures who only grew in canniness and never in apprehension. Without their stories we would have remained beasts: content with survival, oblivious to death, aloof to the possible, expecting nothing new.

And so on.

There is something odd here, of course. It is not exactly new, in a fantasy context, to make poignant assertions (with which this reviewer deeply concurs) about the power of Story; and O’Leary is properly eloquent. But at the same time, he fits these wise apophthegms about Story within a structure of explanation which is very far from story-like: Story (as the Teller tells the told of the cast) is the gift the novel is all about; it is a gift of the wizards.

As uttered here, perhaps amusedly, this deprecatory presumption is a totalizing claim very similar to those found in the techno-occultism manuals of Erich Von Däniken, a writer who piously claims to exempt his techno-occultism, which is doctrine, from any hint of “fantasy,” which is Story. So it is pretty dangerous for O’Leary to suggest – as he does at several points in his text – that the

wizards who create the world are in fact ancient astronauts; because by doing so he has risked creating a nest of Stories which are, in the end, little more than a pack of rumours about the true shape of things.

I don’t think he wished to do this. I don’t think he wished to create, in *The Gift*, a novel whose fantasy structure and telling was nothing more than a rumour about the true nature of the world; a novel which could fit, without much finagling, into David Brin’s Uplift sequence. (How Brin manages to sidestep Von Däniken is another story; an interesting one.) I was too won over by O’Leary’s cunning nest of stories to wish to think I should have best understood that nest through a scrim of dramatic irony, dolloped with pathos; I did not wish to think of *The Gift* as an exercise in cod anthropology, as though his protagonists were aboriginals attempting to come to terms with the new NASA base. I think O’Leary was trying to write a fantasy novel, a text whose truths were embodied in the shape of the tales which tell it. I think he almost buggered it up.

But not quite.

The story is not simple, and circles like snakes. A ship at sea snags a naked woman in its nets. She is dead. The Captain behaves oddly. The Crew is transfixed. The Teller in the bow of the ship, who has been silent, begins to speak. In a few hundred words, like a jewelled incipit, he lays down the novel to come; it is a myth of origin. Tatoan, a wizard of long ago, “the last of the great race who fell out of the sky,” tells the people he has created that a great danger will come to them. There will

come a man who tries “to take death out of the world,” as in the third volume of Ursula Le Guin’s *Earthsea* books; and if he succeeds the magic – the story – of the world will spoil. But a Guardian will be born. Her name will be Mother Death. She will save you.

That is the end of the prologue. But the Teller is not finished. He now begins to recite a nest of tales, which make up the body of the novel. A young king is cursed with supernatural hearing by an alchemist who has discovered how to take death out of the world, and who is now known as the Usher of the Night. The young king goes walkabout, and is rescued by the boy Simon, who has learned to ride the winds. Other stories intersect, deepening and darkening the main double-line of story. The Land dries and rots. But eventually, the Usher is defeated (by a humble woman whose name will be Mother Death), green comes again to the Land, the King is cured; and all is well.

But then we return, via a circum-bendibus, to the ship. The Teller is the boy Simon, now middle-aged. More climaxes resolve elements of the tale that seem to have been forgotten. Marriages end the day.

Because so much of *The Gift* is told as stories within stories, and because so many of these inserted tales take traditional forms, it is indeed possible to read the book as an anthropological take on “primitive” apprehensions of the world. The first wizard is a crashed space captain, and the Usher runs an agribusiness; and Story is rumour. It is, in the end, a narrow call. If we end being able to believe the nest of stories as a fantasy – i.e. as being true as far as the book can know – it is because of the intricacies of speed of the telling; the way O’Leary’s prose flowers, suddenly, like hard candy in a hot mouth. The dance of delights of *The Gift* keep it from Despite, but just. It is, in other words, only the brilliance of *The Gift* which keeps it from falling.

It would be a pleasure to pick what one likes out of Nicholas Royle’s *The Matter of the Heart* (Abacus, £9.99) and run, but that would be grave-robbing. Out of a ragbag diversity of material (some of it told from the heart, like the segments dealing with the death of the narrator’s father, which read like raw autobiography), Royle has jobbed together a most extraordinarily absent text. It is like notes to parts of a dozen novels not yet written; it is not like a novel. Lots of material visits sections of *The Matter of the Heart*, but as there’s no there there when the page is reached, no gravity well to fix disjecta membra into an organon, none of this material stays to answer any questions.

Sure. This is deliberate. A prefatory quote from Robert Irwin’s



*Exquisite Corpse* speaks of "tunnels criss-crossing under the universe and a sense of infinitely deep abysses folding in upon themselves." We are cued: the world is a godgame but the rules are Martian. There may be narrative connections and maps and routes and intersections in *The Matter of the Heart*, but each one of them will be gapped by abyss; and the narrator – one of those ravaged, car-obsessed, entropic epigones young British writers seem to have extracted holus-bolus but pig-ignorant from the years of plague of M. John Harrison – will find it his task obsessively to pursue teasing absences down the Martian Sphinx-face passages of the world. Sure. We know this.

But it simply does not work. Given the material he needs to box into one text – the autobiography mentioned above; travel notes from America and Australia; secret routes through the heart of London; one gaslight-romance era heart-transplant (quite well done, in fact); sex acts to describe (not so well); roman à clef riffs to linger over; diseases to demarcate; searches for the map within the world to set off on – the book is swamped; and comically, in order to attempt to cope with all this stuff, Royle ends up not with one late-century floating protagonist flashing his decoding ring around the breakfast in the ruins, but four.

These are: the seemingly unemployed narrator with lots of money; his friend Max, whose function in the text is dizzyingly indistinguishable from the narrator's, though he gets dismayingly less to do; Charlie, a large American out of Le Carré, whose prominence in the text almost certainly depends upon Royle's wish to write about New Orleans; and Danny, the small goateed rock-climber with an ear problem who lurks through Australia, chased by or chasing the narrator – after having kidnapped the narrator's fab doctor lover – like a grump Guilty.

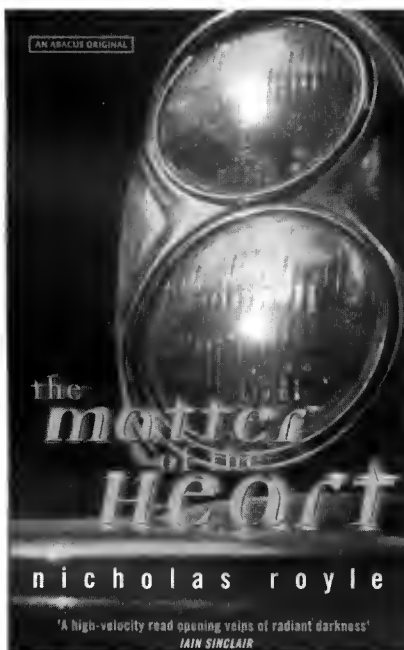
Along the way there are hints of Iain Sinclair's London, mainly in the palimpsesting of heart-linked events in one room in a hospital near Hyde Park Corner, which later becomes a hotel; unearned tropes (like the use of car fetishism as metonymy) from Harrison, in addition to the use of his body; an Australian character straight out of J. G. Ballard; a distant echo of Paul Bowles (I could have misheard it); and more. The sf element lies in a century-long consanguinity of hearts, metaphysical and matter, focused on the hospital/hotel. This consanguinity communicates with the rest of the text, however, as gap not suture. The matter of the heart is, in the end, an absence.

Almost every page of this strange undone book, all the same, as I hinted earlier, has something to like.



There are observations, confessions, surges of emotion, normalcies and abysses, that make you like the narrator. Which is not the same as agreeing with him (he's in any case very hard to separate from Royle, who is the same age, and had the same father, and almost certainly took almost exactly the same interminable trip through Australia).

In the end, the book collapses because it attempts to effect a sign-change on various works of M. John Harrison, the author whose own work most conspicuously marks these pages. A novel like Harrison's *The Course of the Heart* (1991) fastens its gaze upon a world that one must religiously attempt to understand, so one can cut loose. It is a world whose disjecta membra threaten to connect, hence the centripetal density of Harrison's tales of attempted, solitary escape. In *The Matter of the Heart*, on the other hand, the world threatens to dissipate, hence the failed flustered



tour-bus gestures at garnering that signal the text's true lack of a longed-for cohesion; in this book, the world wears the aspect of a club to be joined. For M. John Harrison the world is a hell we must anatomize, in order to gain our freedom; for Nicholas Royle it is an initiation rite.

Nowhere but in the genre of sf could a book like Tony Daniel's *Earthling* (Tor, \$22.95) ever be published. It is a fixup – a term this reviewer continues to use despite pleas from writers who think of it as pejorative; and which may be defined as a text at least some of whose component parts were previously published, or could have been published, as autonomous tales. It does not matter whether or not an author intended these parts to make one final story; what matters is the kind of narrative experience they represent.

A fixup may come into being, deliberately or post hoc, as a matter of publishing expedience; there is nothing wrong in this, or particularly interesting (though one might note this sort of assembled text rarely appears outside the sf field). More interestingly, a fixup may, deliberately or post hoc, read as a structural response to the challenge – always central to serious sf – of representing, and extrapolating upon, a vision of the course of history. Fixups of the greatest interest are fly-eye snapshots of history. Like time-travel stories, though far more vitally, or haiku, they are a body English of the workings of Time.

*Earthling* is not the best fixup ever written – Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) is probably still the supreme example – but it's a reputable working out of the virtues (and some of the deficiencies) of the form. We begin around the turn of the century. A mining robot gradually (and implausibly) gains consciousness, a process intensified when the mind of an impassioned, newly-dead geologist is fed into the mix. Ecological supremacists dominate the Pacific north-west region this amalgam haunts; and Orf (the robot eventually names itself after Orpheus) goes underground, where he/it/they begin to encounter "terranes" 60 miles underground. Terranes – we learn 200 pages later – may be extraterrestrials hatched from eggs lodged beneath Antarctica; or they may be Gaia flakes; or designated drivers for the apprehension of the aesthetic sublime which shapes the universe in *Earthling*.

Lots of stuff. A "normal" novel would continue with it. *Earthling*, however, is a fixup. In the next section, we leap 200 years further on, enter the story of an aberrant forest ranger named Jarrod, follow him (for most of the rest of the book) through



an orthodox (though far more heavily sexed than hitherto) post-catastrophe hegira through the usual bevy of balkanized statelets.

Finally there is a big earthquake. Orf hardly makes an appearance in all this.

The final section, many years further on, gathers terranes, variously evolved humans, and an attendant Orf together to discuss the possibility that an fti object called the Chunk

may mean harm to Earth. (Rather as in Daniel's earlier *Warpath* [1993], folk travel between the stars by mental effort, or through dreams, or something similar; and lots of these starfarers via dream also horn in.) At novel's end, it's not known exactly what the Chunk may portend – it may, in fact, be a connoisseur. Or a strip developer. Whatever it is, the text stops, but the fixup-hoodedness of the tale carries the reader, tran-

scendentalized, forward and upward and outward and away.

There are delights and mild sillinesses throughout *Earthling*, which is a bit pogostick; and a sense that only here – only in a literature whose list of characters includes the world-through-time – could such a farrago of gaps ever be found. Fixups are the footprints of the world going on. *Earthling* hops that way.

John Clute

Let's get small – very small, that is, as in nanotechnology, the magic dust chock full of little factories no bigger than bacteria, that, working on a molecular scale (a nanometre is a millionth of a millimetre), could theoretically manufacture anything from a slab of beef to a Volkswagen using only a solution of the appropriate chemicals. And since we're not much more than colonies of millions of tiny bags of chemicals, nanotechnology could transform us too, change our bodies or change our minds. It's a powerful trope utilized in dozens of recent sf novels, including Kathleen Ann Goonan's first novel, *Queen City Jazz* (reviewed in *IZ* 91). *Mississippi Blues* (Tor, \$25.95), is a sequel that deepens the vision of the first in a fresh take on that old sf standard, the post-catastrophe picaresque.

The familiar landscape of the American mid-West has been transformed and partitioned by the Information Wars, and is populated by people enslaved to the past by ideas (or memes) transmitted by nanotechnology. Some have been engulfed by whole personalities, from the greats of blues music to (since the voyage is down the Mississippi on a riverboat) Mark Twain. The whole of America has become a Disneyland with no exits.

A long, somewhat clumsy, but necessary prologue eases us into the complex story begun in *Queen City Jazz*. In that novel, Verity, an orphan raised by a community of Quakers who tried to exclude nanotechnology from their lives, travelled to the city of Cincinnati, where she discovered that she was a clone of the woman who held its population in thrall. Like all cities after the Information Wars, when broadcast signals ceased to work, Cincinnati was a fortress in which information was transmitted through complex pheromones regulated by nano-manufactured Bees and Flowers. Verity destroyed her original, rebooted the city and freed its people, driving them out by infecting them with a meme that made them want to travel downriver towards the fabled city of Norleans.

*Mississippi Blues* tells how Verity shepherds her charges to their destination with the help of Blaze, a fellow Quaker murdered by the community's leader and resurrected

through nanotechnology, and a cast of misfits picked up along the way. Verity discovers that she is pregnant by a lover she met in Cincinnati; Blaze is able to rebuild his identity by becoming a blues musician; it slowly becomes clear that the Information Wars are far from over.

It is a hectic, congested and at first seemingly unfocused narrative, but our attention is held by Goonan's detailed and gloriously inventive depiction of remnants of a civilization hypnotized by the past, from a pleasure island run by sinister, Circe-like clowns to the city of Memphis, enslaved by its Bees. A charlatan in self-repairing clothes carries a kit of nanotechnology that is the ultimate in cure-all potions; different manifestations of Mark Twain argue over the nature of the world and the true spirit of mankind.

The blues are the thread which binds the narrative. Just as they were originally the music of a people freed from slavery yet still chained by awful circumstance, so here they echo the travails of people trying to escape from a history in which nanotechnology now has a manifesto of its own, and control has passed from human hands. Slowly and stealthily, Goonan reveals that apparently random incidents are all part of a carefully structured story about the getting of wisdom. Two of the passengers picked up along the way turn out to be agents whose roles reveal crucial facts about the nature of the catastrophe; after Verity is infected with capitalism in Memphis, a doctor sees her reaction to Blazes's blues and realizes that the tyranny of nanotechnology can be overcome; and the real reason behind the collapse of communications is revealed,

although as something of an afterthought whose implications are not fully worked out – perhaps there will be a third novel in the series.

With lyrical yet scientifically literate renderings of the miracles and terrors of nanotechnology, Goonan presents a landscape fertile with possibility and drenched in a strange and terrible history, yet she never loses sight of the human stories which inhabit it. The plot is wrenched from the heart of sf and transformed, like the landscape through which Verity and her ship of fools travel, in startling ways. With only her third novel, Goonan has established herself as a strong and original voice.

John W. Campbell, Jr., said disparagingly that his own early stories "... were loaded with 500 words of action, 2000 words of hypothetical technology, 500 words of action, 1000 words of science, 500 words of action..." He didn't know it, but he had stumbled upon the ideal formula for a technothriller, and the ideal description of Bart Kosko's *Nanotime* (Avon, \$24). While Goonan embeds her information in her characters and the landscape through which they travel, Kosko is more upfront: every deployment of a bit of tech kit leads to a dizzying disquisition on its function and the science behind it.

It's 2030. The oil is running out. A Sufi terrorist, Hamid Tabriz, is fomenting war in the Middle East. John Grant has invented a revolutionary molecule which splits hydrogen from water, guaranteeing cheap and virtually unlimited energy but making him the target of Tabriz, who can replace his victims' brains with chips carrying his own personality. Grant's fiancée is converted by Tabriz; Grant kills her when she tries to assassinate him, is captured by the US secret service, and then rescued by the Israelis, with whom he has been working. Except they then replace his brain with a chip, so he can confront Tabriz in nanotime, at the speed at which computer processors operate.

The narrative is fast-paced, but Grant has little to do until the climax except be tortured. And the great chunks of persuasively detailed exposition leave little space for such niceties as character development,

## Let's Get Small

Paul J. McAuley

especially as, like most techno-thrillers, *Nanotime* promiscuously deploys a huge cast at whim to speed along its carelessly plotted story.

As a result, we can't much care for Grant, who is in any case an unpleasant character in unpleasant times. He is marrying for money, and seems to want to deploy his invention only to earn enough to buy himself out of the free-market hell of the future USA, where everyone is continually monitored and automatically fined for the slightest transgression. In other words, those smart and rich enough can opt out of the society they helped create, and the rest must suffer the consequences. Bart Kosko is an expert in Fuzzy Logic and professor of electrical engineering at the University of Southern California. Maybe *Nanotime* works best as an awful warning about the agenda of those who promise to shape the future.

We all know how history repeats itself, and Connie Willis's *To Say Nothing of the Dog* (Bantam, \$23.95) precisely fits the saw, for this hectic farce is a sequel to her time-travelling tragedy *Doomsday Book*. We start, as in Willis's story "Fire Watch," in an English cathedral, at the height of the Blitz, but here it is Coventry rather than St Paul's. A bunch of time-travellers from Oxford University's history department, led by Ned Henry, are scouring the newly burnt-out ruin for a Victorian monstrosity known as the bishop's bird stump (its exact nature is a wonderful joke I won't reveal). They need to copy the bishop's bird stump so that an exact replica of Coventry Cathedral can be completed to the satisfaction of Oxford University's eccentric and bellicose benefactress, Lady Shrapnell. Unfortunately, for a reason that later gains importance, the self-regulating space-time continuum which binds history makes it impossible for them to arrive *before* the air-raid.

They return without finding the bishop's bird stump, and although Ned is suffering from time-lag he must plunge back to Victorian Oxford to return a cat (cats are extinct in his era) rescued from drowning by another time-traveller, the lovely Verity Kindle. Dazed and confused, Ned is plunged into a comedy of errors. The cat's rescue threatens to undo the course of history, and Ned and Verity's attempts to straighten things out seem only to exacerbate the problem. The meeting of a Victorian young lady with her future husband is threatened; incongruities in the flow of time, which prevent visits to significant moments of history, threaten to trap every time-traveller in the past.

It is not an original plot (it was used to good effect in the first of Robert Zemeckis's *Back to the Future* film trilogy), but the complications and confusions of mistaken identity,

misapprehension and Ned's blundering through Victorian mores are expertly handled, evoking classic English detective fiction, P. G. Wodehouse and, of course, Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat, to Say Nothing of the Dog*. Ned remains something of a cipher, but Connie Willis marshals around him a busy cast of deftly drawn eccentrics, spiritualists, bounders and Victorian maidens, and her vision of the more monstrous aspects of the late Victorian age is bracing and detailed (although I'm pretty sure no English railway customarily boasted Western-style carriages with observation platforms at their rear), and rendered with an acute sense of the absurd.

Although billed as sf, the science is non-existent; just how the space-time continuum regulates itself (is it self-aware, or does it respond to a First Cause?), other than as a convenient plot device, is never explained. But that's to miss the point. Like Tim Powers's *The Anubis Gates*, *To Say Nothing of the Dog* deploys the sf theme of time travel to drive its plot rather than to explore cosmological or quantum cosmological implications. And the plot, interlaced with ingenious discourses on the role of contingency and chaos in the course of history, is a cat's cradle that does at last neatly unravel: the identity of the husband turns nicely on the strictures of the 1930s detective novels of which Verity is enamoured, as does the mystery of how the continuum cured itself of temporal hiccups. A delight.

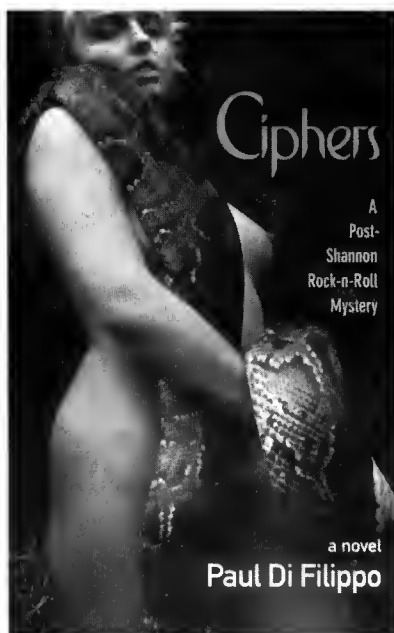
John Kessel's recent time-travel novel *Corrupting Dr Nice* (reviewed in *IZ* 120) borrowed a twist invented by Bruce Sterling and Lew Shiner: you do not travel back to your own past but instead to one of a myriad moment universes which immediately split off from the main track upon your arrival. Since there are

137.04 moment universes per second, the past can be plundered without remorse. Two short stories set in the same universe bookend Kessel's sort-of-second short-story collection *The Pure Product* (Tor, \$23.95), half of which (although not, oddly, the fine Nebula Award-winning fantasy "Another Orphan") was previously published in *Meeting in Infinity* by the small press imprint, Arkham House.

In most of these stories, sf tropes are deployed not as extrapolation from or exploration of scientific truths, but to furnish satires or allegories, and a number suggest that Kessel is deeply uneasy with the notion of sf in any form. "Invaders" interweaves two narrative strands – the conquest of the Incas by the Spanish in search of gold, and the conquest of Earth by aliens in search of cocaine – with a third in which Kessel himself comments on the story and likens sf to delusional escapism, much like a drug. And like any addict too weak to resist what he really despises, Kessel too often sinks into self-loathing. In "The Pure Product," which echoes Cyril Kornbluth's classic "The Little Black Bag," science overwhelms all that is good (that is, literature and art), leading to a population of amoral but omnipotent vandals who travel back to our own era to cause mayhem. Escapism, as in "A Clean Escape," is comforting but only at a terrible price. The narrator trapped in the dream-like parable of "Buddha Nostri Bird" tells us that "Unlike a scientist ... I could explain that some truths are eternal and ought to be held inviolate, and why a culture that accepts change indiscriminately is rotten at its heart." Eternal truths in a late 20th-century sf story? It's like stumbling across a passionate case for mesmerism in *The Lancet*.

But even when they are excoriating the very genre which they notionally inhabit, the stories are finely written and polish their points to a nicety. And when Kessel stops trying to write across the grain of the genre, he is very good indeed. "Faustfeathers" (originally a short story collected in *Meeting in Infinity*, presented here as a play) reinterprets the myth of Faust as by the Marx Brothers, and joyously runs away with itself. "The Franchise," an alternate history of baseball in which George Herbert Walker Bush must face the most fearsome pitcher of the season, Fidel Castro, works both as a nicely turned allegory and as an homage to the myths of USA's inscrutable national sport.

And in the two stories related to *Corrupting Dr Nice*, Kessel has found a form of sf in which he is able to deploy his formidable talents without self-scouring guilt. "Some Like It Cold" is a bleak fable in which the amoral time-traveller Detlev Gruber



rescues Marilyn Monroe from suicide, caused by her despair at being exploited for her sexuality. Briefly, Gruber is touched by her plight: "... I had a sudden sense of her as a real person, a grown woman in a lot of trouble." But his greed overcomes his scruples and he persuades her to travel with him to the future, where he knows that she will be exploited all over again. Only at the last are we allowed to see that Gruber's pity is real rather than a reflex. "The Miracle of Ivar Avenue," the best story in the collection, is more openly redemptive. It's set a scrupulously furnished late 1940s, and told from the point of view of a Los Angeles detective. The body of the film director Preston Sturges is found washed up on a beach (in reality – our reality – Sturges committed suicide in a carbon monoxide-filled garage), yet Sturges is alive and well, ready to restart his career after crippling setbacks. The solution to the mystery involves time travel and Detlev Gruber, makes some sharp points about character and the absurdities of destiny, and allows the detective to make his own peace with personal tragedy.

These later stories show Kessel able to relax within the parameters of the genre. They show him stretching perceived restrictions rather than raging against them. They show just how good he can be.

I reviewed the first three volumes of Terry Goodkind's "Sword of Truth" series in *Interzones* 90, 103 & 119. If you have those numbers you can refresh your memory; if you haven't, they're still in print and contain other (and some might say yet greater) goodies than my columns.

The American publisher makes two claims for *Temple of the Winds* (Tor, \$26.95; Millennium, £17.99), the fourth volume. The first is that Goodkind has not only sustained his level as a writer but enhanced it. I'm unable to support that, mainly because either he or (I suspect) his editor has decided to continue with the many ungainly datadumps which so disfigured the second and third volumes. Moreover, although some of his ideas are interesting, notably the contingent character of the prophecies which impel the plot and the special powers of the Mother Confessor, both have already appeared; apart from an expansion of the interesting and original qualities of the ab-human called sliph, nothing of great substance is added here.

On the debit side, Goodkind continues to overdo the high-minded conversation and his choice of names for minor characters remains inept – this book features one called Clive Anderson. Moreover, the relationship

Like many of his short stories, Paul Di Filippo's first novel, *Ciphers* (Cambrian Publications/Permeable Press, \$16.95), brilliantly evokes the USA's counter-culture, where the wild fringes of sf and other pulp genres, rock'n'roll, comix and conspiracy theory promiscuously miscegenate. This big, baggy novel alternates a kind of post-Pynchon secret history of the 20th century with a free-wheeling contemporary narrative in which a slacker record-store clerk, Cy Prothero, searches for his lost girlfriend, who was working for the mysterious Wu Laboratories. Cy falls in with his girlfriend's best friend Polly, who is looking for her disappeared boyfriend, and pretty soon they're embroiled with each other and with a worldwide conspiracy which aims to achieve enlightenment and total control of time and information.

Like all conspiracy theories, *Ciphers* invokes a paranoid semiosis by which everything is connected to everything else, thus rendering all connections equally valid or equally meaningless. But Di Filippo turns this failing into a game, its playful rearrangement of the meaning of recent history revolving around a conflation of information theory and molecular biology (the latter, in about the only serious thesis of the novel, is held to be a branch of information theory; our DNA is a cipher of ourselves, or maybe *vice versa*). Peppered with snatches from rock lyrics

(sometimes seamlessly, sometimes not: so it goes), it is by turns sexy, hectic, penetrating, daft, infuriating and funny. Although its ending completely unravels, as if Di Filippo could not work out or could not be bothered to work out how to round up all the hares he set in motion, at the same time it sends up the genre it pretends to inhabit.

As Cy complains, "It's not even a proper conspiracy! There's no stealth, there's no ideology, there's no attempt at secrecy, there's no organization! There's not even any obvious damn goals! A million schemes just seem to be at cross-purposes with the other half! It's not mechanistic, it's – it's organic! It's a big funky soup!" Sometimes overcooked, and with perhaps too many ingredients stirred into the mix, Di Filippo's soup may be an acquired taste, but if you're familiar with his dense and deft short stories, you will know that it is also addictive.

**A correction.** In the review of Dan Simmons's *The Rise of Endymion* (IZ 124), the fourth and last novel in the series which began with *Hyperion*, I conflated the title of the third novel, *Endymion*, with the second, *The Fall of Hyperion*. And some readers may not know that *The Hyperion Cantos* is Simmons' preferred overall title for the first two books in the series. Apologies.

Paul J. McAuley

## Stand Alone?

Chris Gilmore

between Richard, Kahlen and the partially reformed Mord Sith has come to resemble a sitcom, mainly thanks to the advent of Nadine, a pushy ex-girlfriend of Richard's. This is exacerbated by the indefensible decision of Richard and Kahlen not to engage in further sexual relations until they are formally married according to the rites of the Mud People, as it would upset some prudish old retainers. The notion that a ruling couple should offer a moral example to their subjects appears to have passed them by – curiously, given the hypertrophied sense of duty under

which both labour – but it serves a contrivance later in the book.

Richard and Kahlen continue their struggle with the Dreamwalker, First Wizards Zedd and Nathan are still out of contact, the fear of betrayal is as strong as ever. Goodkind's suspense-writing, and his portrayal of terror, grief and desolation, are as good as ever; on this occasion he achieves some sort of first by having his heroine raped, and not by mere accident but with the connivance of his hero – and all in the line of duty. To bring that off is an extraordinary achievement, but he still lowers the tone disastrously whenever he gets bored: "but somehow being in the Wizard's Keep after dark seemed somehow worse." The text is littered with literally hundreds of such small solecisms – inexcusably so, because anyone with an attentive ear could have put them right.

The second claim, which I presume the datadumps are supposed to support, is that the book can be read as a stand-alone novel. That I dispute even more strongly; granted, each volume so far has ended with a break in the fighting, but by now some overall structure is beginning to emerge. A story of this kind must end either in catastrophe or with the surviving good guys living more-or-less



happily ever after; *The Sword of Truth* is an n-volume novel, not a Greek-prefixed -logy, so there's no point whatever in buying this fourth book if you haven't already enjoyed the other three. As to whether it's your own dish of tea, Goodkind is a writer of some pretention, which means that he can afford nothing slapdash. What will do at a pinch for Collin Webber or Craig Shaw Gardner will not do here. Beyond that, I dislike repeating myself; read my notices of the earlier volumes, which are all in print in A-format.

Writing in *Foundation*, Jennifer Swift observed (of a novel which shall remain nameless here) that "It takes talent to write a truly bad book." Larry S. Friedman, who designed Peter Crowther's latest anthology, *Destination Unknown* (White Wolf, \$12.99), evidently has talent of a similar order. Douglas Winter's cover illustration is perfunctory, the typeface is undistinguished, the prelims are crowded and messy, the running heads are hideous, affected and wasteful. Even the blurb is calculated to make enemies; it boasts contributions by seven named writers, including Alan Dean Foster, Charles de Lint and Lisa Tuttle plus nine, implicitly lesser-light "others." As the latter include Ian Watson, Ian McDonald and Christopher Fowler the system employed eludes me.

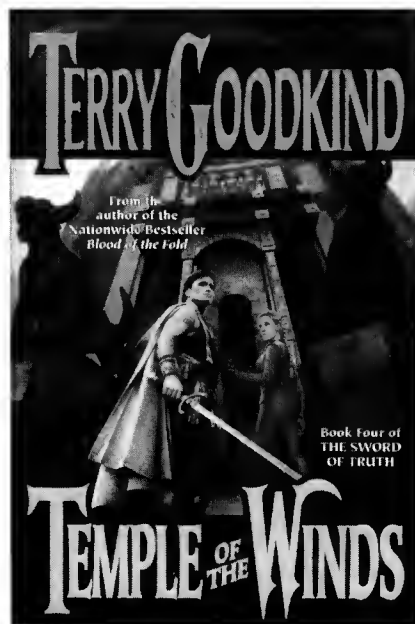
But once inside the covers, and past Anne McCaffrey's largely autobiographical introduction, the initial bad impression rapidly dissipates. We have here a collection of contemporary fantasy, heavily but not exclusively slanted to dark surrealism, and very conservative in tone. There's an excellent example of R. A. Lafferty on top form, but it's the Lafferty of *Nine Hundred Grandmothers*; Terry Dowling's "The Maiden Death" recalls early Delany in style, and gives the impression of having been yanked from the middle of something rather fine, while Storm Constantine's contribution would have fitted seamlessly into Brian Aldiss's *The Airs of Earth*. Even Ian McDonald has returned to the Mars of *Desolation Road*. Christopher Fowler contributes a blackly comic exploration of sick-building syndrome, and Michael Libling's "A Bite to Eat in Abbotsford" is gruesomely funny and meticulously observed.

No one here writes badly, though not all the stories are well constructed. Kathleen Goonan's is worst in that regard – a sketchy beginning followed by a splurge of happy endings with no intervening middle. Is this an example of the "feelgood writing" one hears about? I was still waiting for De Lint's to reveal its point when it ended abruptly, while Watson's and Foster's petered out rather than concluding. After a promising

start, James Lovegrove's ending was simply weak. Lisa Tuttle's story read like the opening chapter of a twin-worlds romance that didn't quite gel – surprisingly, since the foundation seems solid enough and there are several obvious lines of development. Perhaps she should have a further word with Crowther – competent editors are thin on the ground...

None of the other stories, by Jeremy Dyson, Bentley Little, Tom Shippey and Ramsey Campbell, displayed such defects, but they all covered over-familiar ground – the curse of generic writing, and of reviewers; those who have read less than I will like them better. Still, with six superb hits and no bad prose, this is a superior collection. I hope it finds a UK publisher, but whoever buys it *must* have it reset if it's to be taken seriously. That shouldn't cost much; a timid amateur with a basic DTP package could do an infinitely better job than Friedman. And while they're at it, the intro adds nothing to the book or McCaffrey's reputation. I'm sure Crowther could do a lot better himself.

I am just old enough to remember the vogue for the romances of Georgette Heyer. Set mainly in the Regency period, they featured handsome, blue-blooded, slightly debauched gallants and plucky young ladies of humbler birth who often found it necessary to dress up as boys, the better to protect their virtue while getting their share of the action. They were good, clean, unpretentious fun, but up to now I knew of only one attempt to revive the genre as fantasy: Freda Warrington's *A Taste of Blood Wine*. That book is heavily cut with other influences, but Patricia C. Wrede offers the unadulterated McCoy, with the trifling difference that hers is an alternative world where magic works. Her current offering, *Magician's Ward* (Tor, \$22.95) catches



the atmosphere well enough, though her evocations of period upper-class slang and thieves' cant are unconvincing and a touch repetitive – too many coves, toffs and culls below decks, too few French catchphrases above.

The anachronistically named Kim, a juvenile delinquent now coming on nicely into womanhood, has had the good fortune to be taken up by Mairelon, a well connected wizard of some note. That entails being launched into Society, trained as a wizard (here the term covers both sexes – a change from all those male witches, I suppose) and involved in the various intrigues which are a part of his inheritance. All these are described from Kim's viewpoint with enough vigour and good humour to excuse the absence of any sense of danger or very much narrative thrust until over halfway through.

Thereafter the pace quickens, with Kim forced by circumstance to pitch her immature and largely untried powers against both a sinister, hidden enemy and the pitiless standards of the Upper Crust. The resolution is neatly constructed (though it offers no surprises), and unlike Goodkind's books it stands alone well enough. I gather that it's a sequel to her earlier *Mairelon the Magician* which, were I many years younger, I might well seek out. As it is ... how this one comes to be marketed as an adult novel I've no idea; you could try it on children up to 14, or as a first therapeutic step for someone who desires to be weaned away from Mills & Boon onto serious literature.

And definitely for adults only... My favourite among all Wilde's epigrams states that "Sincerity in art is largely a matter of talent." My own corollary is that the same goes with knobs on for acceptability in sex-writing. Nothing is more dreary than ill-produced porn, but to write it with charm, grace and above all wit is a challenge which many writers of the top rank have refused to take up – no doubt wisely aware of their limitations.

Robert Irwin has chosen to take it up with *Prayer-Cushions of the Flesh* (Dedalus, £6.99), a fantasy set, not in the real Ottoman Istanbul but in Istanbul as conceived by Ingres (whose Grande Odalisque or Turkish Bath would have furnished a better cover illustration than the relevant but rather lacklustre Jules Migonney [who he?]). The story, such as it is, exists purely to display its own ornamentation, so searchers after deep psychological truths will be disappointed. It concerns Prince Orkhan, one of Sultan Selim's many sons, who has passed the years from five to 20 in the Cage at the Heart of the Imperial Harem. There he has been chronically bored, with nothing to do and no com-

pany but eunuchs and his half-brothers, with whom he has engaged in sodomy very much as a *pis aller*.

One day his fortunes change for the better, as he is led out of the Cage, not to immediate strangulation with a silken bowstring (as might reasonably be expected) but to succeed his father as sultan; but he quickly discovers that as sultan he is no autocrat, nor even a figurehead,

There are those who *understand* the work of Iain Sinclair. Not those who crease their foreheads while reading him and reward themselves with a cup of tea at the end of every paragraph. Nor the people who, every now and then, think: "Yes, got that..." Reading Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is akin to following the author around the rooms in his own head and finding fresh delights in each. But Sinclair's imagination is not best described in terms of rooms, however large they might be. Interpreting his prose is like watching for tectonic plates to shift and re-settle. The failure to connect with what Sinclair would call an author's psycho-geography is a terrible admission, and had I not been reviewing *Slow Chocolate Autopsy* (Phoenix House, £9.99) I might have closed it and saved it for a rainy day. But to take a quote out of context, "you don't have to understand him to dig him."

The book is far from being a linear narrative. It's a London fantasy, but the quest is vague (not least for those involved) which makes a synopsis nigh-on impossible. The most important character is Norton, although (paradoxically) the best chapters are those in which he is a rumour, a whisper. ("Who said Norton exists? There's no record of him.") Norton is present during certain moments in London's history. He can move through time but cannot leave the confines of the city: "He gets the first dangerous whiff of Epping Forest and starts to lose his shape. These terraces can hardly be called London. A couple more miles and Norton would be a smear of gas." The freedom of movement through time, of course, is an idea that Kurt Vonnegut used in *Slaughterhouse Five*, and the notion of a character's apparent ubiquity has been explored by Woody Allen in *Zelig* and Tom Waits on "Black Wings." But Sinclair's collaborative book is like none of the above. We witness the interdependency between Norton and London, and Norton and the other characters – even the gangster, Jack the Hat.

It's a dense read: less than 200 pages long, but rich – like chocolate itself. Sinclair's brevity has much to do with the fact that he's a poet. One- and two-word sentences are not uncommon in *Slow Chocolate*

but the powerless pet of the Harem. His orders are ignored, he himself must defer to the whims of everyone he meets (most irksomely, to a dwarfish buffoon), and though sex is made plentifully available to him, it is invariably on terms set by the lady. As the ladies are all barking mad (probably), possessed of extraordinary notions (certainly) and incorrigibly talkative thereupon, Orkhan finds his situation palls rapidly. Moreover, it is

a situation of appalling danger, offering little prospect of escape save by means of one or other of the fancy deaths on offer.

So how does he cope? Suffice it to say that the ending is highly satisfactory, and entirely in the spirit of the *1001 Nights*. There's even a moral, though of no great profundity – and in a bare 140 pages of largish type, who could as for more?

Chris Gilmore

## Psycho-geographies

David Mathew

*Autopsy*. You have to bite into the words to taste the flavour that comes out. Similarly, Sinclair offers up rich and startling descriptive phrases: "Lips to inspire a Dali sofa. Lips that could shovel snow." Or: "Like the rest of us, he takes the dictation of his controllers. This is a zone of electromagnetic privilege. These buildings generate paranoia. That's their only purpose" – which hints at the influence of William Burroughs, and in whose book *Junky* a character called Norton is also present. (Burroughs, furthermore, appears as a character in *Autopsy*.)

Paranoia is one of Sinclair's main themes ("Paranoia is knowing more than you can use") and to help the author, Dave McKean (given equal star-billing) provides the artwork for the comic-book sections. These are some of the closest depictions of the fragmentary nature of nightmare that this reviewer has seen. But there is humour too – briefly. Or more accurately, perhaps, it could be described as nervous laughter. A religious crusader is "a tambourine shaker. From Salt Lake City or wherever... A come-on girl backing a margarine-haired messiah." Or: "it had her purring like a coyote on heat in a truckstop corral." But even this levity is soon drowned in fertile moribund imagery.

A brilliant mind in the body of an author surely has three choices.

Anthony Burgess's approach was to distil his intelligence into easily-assimilated narratives, however challenging the subject matter. He was an entertainer. Georges Perec's approach was to write an example of every existing literary form so that he would not get bored. He was an entertainer-artist. Iain Sinclair has chosen to be an artist, if the concept of choice is even present. The reader will need to work. This is a chewy text, written with pith and pluck and gumption. Recommended.

Also containing a real-life writer (or several) in a fictional setting is S. P. Somtow's *Darker Angels* (Gollancz, £16.99). At the end of the first chapter Walt Whitman shows up, greeted by the prissy widow of a late reverend as follows: "You're some kind of poet; a bad one, if truth were told. Very modern, if you please; no rhyme and little reason..." Somtow goes on to use Whitman, Lord Byron and Poe, not to mention Abraham Lincoln, as a much larger part of the main plot than Sinclair does with Burroughs. Some might say as too large a part, for this type of intertextual shenanigan – this rewriting of history for no obvious point whatever – is always a hit-or-miss affair.

One misgiving is in the choice of multiple narrators and the retro-chronological plotline. We begin in 1865, at the death of a religious abolitionist of slavery: Reverend Grainger. His widow begins, detailing some sudden bad behaviour by their black slave, Phoebe. Why is Phoebe playing up? Enter Whitman to take a turn at narrating, and then his lover, Zachary Brown. Horror being a genre in which the events of the book's present are usually the results of seeds sown before, the book goes back to 1864. Brown talks about the Civil War and the ugliness of slavery; he also describes a were-leopard that will have a dramatic influence on the plot. But the events of 1865 have not yet been explained, so further back in time the book goes. In tales of a one-eyed shaman (who gave his other, like Odin, for the acquisition of knowledge) and in the travelogue from the Land of the Dead, the reader gets a glimpse of how African leopard cults, and zombies, have affected the events of 1865. The prob-

lem is, by now we have forgotten how to care. For the time capsule is still moving backwards. To explain the findings in 1863 we jump back to 1806, and so on. It's hard to believe that we will return to 1865. It all seems forced and aimless. The plot itself is in a therapist's chair, engaged in a stint of hypnotic regression; each voice is idiosyncratic and a law unto itself.

However, it would be unfair to suggest that *Darker Angels* is a bad book. Although there are dollops of old-fashioned horror fare – the sexual temptation of the religious; virgin births – there are some pleasantly winsome hoity-toity chapter headings that underplay the chapters' intentions ("Wherein Mrs Grainger becomes steadily more discomfited by fresh revelations"), and the snooty Mrs Grainger, who wants to know why her husband died, is fresh. As a lapsed Christian she claims: "I am no mawkish juvenile, to be deceived by ghost stories and tales of hoodoo..." and the better scenes involve the re-evaluations of her faith. There are shocks every bit as harsh as those pertaining to the supernatural. Mrs Grainger receives a letter from the reverend that Phoebe has been hiding, saying: "like me, my dear, you have always really been agnostic... he who adheres to the gospels as though we still dwelt in the Dark Ages is a fool..."

The descriptions of the nature of zombies ("we calls them *les zombis*. It from a Kikongo word *nzambi* that mean a dead man that walk the earth") and the angel with the hundred eyes are well written. The zombies trying to sing while using stolen body-parts as musical instruments shows grim humour. But the main messages of the novel are concerned with liberty and intolerance. When Zachary Brown, for example, says "Why, there weren't many trades a woman was good for, and what call would there be for a darkie lady of the night?" we witness a triple whammy of stylized prejudices. A homosexual man (1) highlighting both the lowly statuses of women (2) and of Blacks (3). Somtow gets to the heart of times by numerous references, thus: "Would Negroes be attending our dinner parties and soirées, even using our waterclosets and teacups? The prospect was none too comforting." It is brave in its ambition, but ultimately a book that once closed will remain so. Superficially, even the title is poor after *The Pavilion of Frozen Women*, or *Vanitas*.

**F**reda Warrington's *Dracula the Undead* (Penguin, £5.99) also has characters already known to the reader. And characters who are writers – at least in the sense that they were fictional people in Bram

Stoker's original *Dracula*, present now (as then) to offer their pixels in the form of journal-entries and letters. It's a sequel, set seven years on from the final scenes of Stoker's book, the Dracula legend being as difficult to kill as the bloodsucker himself. Using the same epistolary method (of which the Victorians were so fond), Warrington has fashioned an enjoyable addition to the mythos.

And most of the old gang are present, although not necessarily alive. In a group, Jonathan and Mina Harker return to Buda-Pesth and Transylvania – to rid themselves of the clinging webs of nightmare. They meet Elena, an 18-year-old, who is under her father's thumb: "I can see how vast and beautiful the world is, but he puts me in a little glass box," she writes. In this sequel, however, the women give as good as they get, and it's not long before Elena, in awe of Mina, joins the Harkers in England and becomes the babyminder for little Quincey, their son. Before this, Elena forms an attachment with a wolf, in whom (we may suppose) the vampire has found a more palatable appearance than that of a bat. Wish-fulfilments become entangled with reality. The wolf gets randy, although it is now not strictly speaking a wolf: "He leans towards me and I think he will kiss me; instead he licks my throat with a long, rough tongue. I shudder from head to foot with revulsion... and yet I want it to continue." Elena enters fugue states, and is accused of being a witch. She swaps being servile to her father for being servile to the wolf, and when the creature dies she inherits its essence.

In England, Jonathan becomes suspicious of Elena and her influence on Quincey. Strange occurrences are afoot. A cat with no reflection attacks Harker. Quincey causes his mother's mouth to bleed. Harker appears to his wife in bed with red eyes as they have sex. (In the sequel, as in the

original, the fear of sex finds an expression, thus, from Harker: "Until this fever leaves us, and is safely gone, Mina and I can no longer share a bed.") Van Helsing arrives to discuss Mina's weird dreams, but then attacks himself with a knife rather than become one of the undead. Following a game of cards, Dracula appears; but who invited him over the threshold? Matters take a turn for the (even) worse when Quincey is kidnapped, forcing Mina to examine her loyalties. For Dracula wants her to follow him if the boy is to be kept safe...

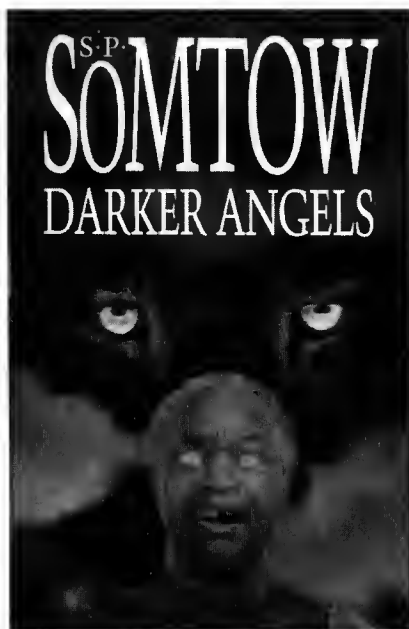
An apocalyptic showdown is par for the course, as is (regrettably) the open invitation for a further sequel. Stylistically, the present perfect tense gives many journal entries a feeling of suspenseful continuation: nobody knows how it's going to end. And if some of the set pieces seem a little film-friendly, it is because we know some of the characters so well; but on the whole this is very good writing.

**F**inally we come to the author's equivalent of a rock band's live album: the recorded reading. Taped in Los Angeles on August 11, 1997 (although a typo on the back of the box says 1977), this is *Talking in the Dark: An Evening of Horror Stories* by Ramsey Campbell and Dennis Etchison. These two veterans of the performance circuit each read two of their own stories. Furthermore, the rock-band analogy seems apt (the Grateful Dead, perhaps) because each of the performers stands aside to let the other take the solo; the tape runs for two hours and 14 minutes, a respectable concert length; and some of the onstage banter between the two colleagues has been left intact.

The best story is Etchison's "The Dead Cop," his World Fantasy Award-nominated tale of gang warfare and the further implications of gang warfare in L.A. With its deliberately OTT title, Campbell's "Kill Me Hideously" has the fan of a former horror-porn novelist wanting to be the star of the author's written victim fantasies. The best single conceit in the package is in Etchison's "The Dog Park," which shows the shallowness of Hollywood movie people, and has these same people meeting in the park to do business, when before they had met in detox clinics.

The readings are clear and uncover veins of humour in the authors' inflections that might not have seemed obvious on the page. If you have difficulty obtaining it in specialist bookshops, it can be bought for £15 plus £2 p&p from Dark Country Productions, 2041 N. Beverley Glen Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90024, USA.

David Mathew



# With *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror: Tenth Annual Collection* (St Martin's Griffin, \$29.95), editors Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling clock up a decade of

presenting their annual choice of the best fantasy (Windling's special responsibility) and horror (Datlow's). And this year they've come up with a volume that, though it has its misses, on balance comes out a winner.

But before getting to the stories you have to plough through (or fast-forward past) a hundred or so pages of summaries of the fantasy and horror genres for 1996. Now this is all very worthy, and no doubt downright valuable to the avid fan, but it's a daunting barrier to the casual reader and it would surely be better sited at the tail-end of the volume.

The story that eventually kick-starts the anthology, a fantasy (and thus a Windling choice) is Parke Godwin's "The Last Rainbow," about a pair of down-at-heel faerie folk who get uncomfortably caught up with a demanding young lady and her even more demanding father, the baron. It's an amusing and altogether agreeable lead-in to the more than 40 stories collected here.

Windling has some other worthwhile choices, such as Patricia A. McKillip's "The Witches of Junket," an evocation of contemporary suburban witchcraft, and Charles de Lint's mature and well-rounded "Crow Girls." There's also the long, strange, disorientating "Among the Handlers" by Michael Bishop, which stays in the mind and does for the American south what *Trainspotting* did for Scotland. "The Reason for Not Going to the Ball" by Tanith Lee is a short, shrewd tilt at the Cinderella story, and Gary Kilworth's "The Goatboy and the Giant" is a well-told cautionary tale of innocent greed and its consequences.

However, there are some we'd happily have done without. While it may seem nice to have Romania represented, Ana Blandiana's "The Phantom Church" is sadly ponderous, as is "In the Matter of the Ukdena" by Bruce Holland Rogers, about an alternative European conquest of America. And while Gerald Vizenor's Amerindian credentials are impeccable, "Oshkwininag: Heartlines on the Trickster Express," is no more fathomable than the title portends. "Little Beauty's Wedding" by Chang Hwang, an offbeat piece based around Chinese death rituals, is of curiosity value mostly, and Patricia C. Wrede's readable but unremarkable "Cruel Sisters" is a fairly conventional reworking of a folk tale recounted in the song of the same name, while Chris Bell's rambling and ill-disciplined "The Cruel Countess," about a bereaved lover's literal encounter with fate in a graveyard, is neither plausible nor off-the-wall enough to work on either level.

There's also the compulsory seasoning of magical realism by Patricia Preciado Martin and the famous Gabriel Garcia Marquez: fortunately both stories are

## Annus Horribilis

Neil Jones and  
Neil McIntosh

brief. Which is about all we'd care to say about the poetry which Windling is responsible for inflicting on us.

The bulk of Datlow's horror choices work well. Terry Dowling's "Beckoning Nightframe" is a clever, unnerving and powerful story of a growing neurosis, and of the everyday going subtly yet fundamentally wrong. Dennis Etchison's "The Dead Cop" carefully builds an atmosphere of unease so that suburban LA becomes transformed into a sinister stalking ground in the protagonist's mind: we sense the angles narrow and the shadows deepen as the city closes in. Thomas Ligotti's excellent "Teatro Grottesco" is a slice of nagging paranoia, Kafka choreographed by David Lynch – or if you'd rather, uniquely Ligotti. In "The Secret of Shih Tan," Graham Masterton serves up sex, cooking and cannibalism in a tasty concoction, although the ending may prove ... a little hard to swallow. Stephen Dedman's edgy "Never Seen By Waking Eyes" is driven by a fascination with the works and persona of Lewis (Charles Dodgson) Carroll: it's part *Alice*-pastiche, part biography, and part vampiric/sexual intrigue story that touches on child sex. Douglas Clegg's "O Rare and Most Exquisite" is off-beam, obscure and haunting, and Robert Olen Butler's "JFK Secretly Attends" is a wry alternative-history story which sets a damaged but still-with-us JFK amongst the memories

and memorabilia of his life with Jackie.

Not quite as successful are: Edward Bryant's "Disillusion," which has well-drawn characters in a tense relationship but fades badly with its conspiracy-theory denouement; Kathe Koja and Barry Malzberg's "Ursus Triad," a very dark reworking of Goldilocks with not a dollop of porridge in sight, which is dense, claustrophobic, easy to admire but hard to like; and A. R. Morlan's "Warmer," a dark-side of rock-and-roll story, all heavy metal, Svengalis and tortured souls, and, though a fast ride, rather dull. Similarly, Susanna Clark's facsimile of a Victorian lady novelist in "The Ladies of Grace Adieu," mannered and tight-laced à la Eliot or Austen, is so authentic it had us wanting to bid it adieu long before the ending. Robert Silverberg collects another paycheck for "Diana of the Hundred Breasts," a routine "sceptic meddles with dark forces" yarn, and Terry Lamsley's overwritten "Walking the Dog" piles sundry horror clichés into an unedifying heap.

Then there are the joint choices, particularly interesting as they signal where the genre boundaries might overlap. Jay Russell's "Lily's Whisper" is a simple, rather gentle story of blood ties that reach beyond the grave, and makes easy agreeable reading. Philip Bracken's "Angel" is a strange, off-kilter tale of angelic possession which successfully treads the fine line between revelation and madness. Michael Marshall Smith's "Not Waving" starts out poor – stilted dialogue, sexist stereotyping and misfiring attempts at humour – but unexpectedly redeems itself as it finds its stride halfway through to deliver a not entirely expected twist. Delia Sherman's "The Witch's Heart" is a competently written but dull women-witches-and-wolves yarn, and "Wilderness" by Ron Hansen was either too clever or too obscure for us to connect with. On the plus side there's "The Snow Pavilion," Angela Carter's last published work, a "lost traveller/strange mansion" format which is very well-crafted and eminently readable, belying its apparent simplicity.

They've also jointly selected the standout story of the entire collection: Isobel Carmody's "The Phoenix," which takes us across a tightrope strung between fantasy and reality via an adolescent girl's skewed relationship with an infant *idiot savant*. Suburban Australia is cleverly used as the backdrop for a mythical world which might – or might not – be real.

The closing story (a Windling choice) may already be known to sf fans from its previous inclusion in last year's Gardner Dozois *Best SF* anthology. We praised it then and we're happy to do so again now because Michael Swanwick's "Radio Waves" is not only a very fine story, equally at home in the fantasy/horror or sf niches but also gives this excellent anthology a strong send-off.

Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh





The Portuguese Association of Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers held their second session of "Encounters" in Cascais, on the Estoril coast, in the final week of September 1997. As on the first occasion in 1996 they produced an anthology of stories in which English and Portuguese versions are set back-to-back. *Side Effects* edited by Maria Augusta and António de Macedo (Simetria, Bloco UV--2.º Piso--Porta 11, Outeiro da Vela, 2750 Cascais, Portugal) contains nine stories and an introduction by Luis Filipe Silva. Two of the stories were presumably written in English, one by local resident David Prescott and the other by the guest-of-honour at the first Encounters, Joe Haldeman; one of the others, by Helena Coelho, was the winner of a competition sponsored by Simetria and the Cascais Town Council; the remaining six provide a showcase for the Portuguese writers who form the core of the Association.

The sheer size of the English-language market creates opportunities for writers which simply do not exist in other languages, even those which have expanded beyond their original national bounds. One result of the economic dominance of English-language publishing is that while there is a veritable deluge of translations pouring out of English into other languages, relatively little trickles the other way. This effect is even further exaggerated in mass-market popular fiction, which is assessed in terms of its ready accessibility to the domestic audience. Even within such nations as Portugal, therefore, the voices of indigenous genre writers are likely to be drowned out by mass-produced imported works, without any hope of their ever getting near a level playing field.

This situation is unfortunate in any case, but it is particularly unfortunate in the case of science fiction: a genre which attempts to deal with the future as well as the present. We now live in a global community, and if the future is to be habitable at all we must address the problems that confront us as global problems to be countered on a global scale. Science fiction which remains contentedly parochial in its world-view and ideological thrust – as much science fiction produced under the pressure of American marketing strategies undoubtedly is – is more likely to distort our thinking about such issues than to make a sensible and useful contribution to it.

The difficulties inherent in launching a counterflow against the American genre-fiction cataract are amply illustrated by this volume, which is by necessity an amateur production. Some of the authors have bravely made their own translations into English; others have recruited the aid of native English-speakers, but literary translation is an art-form and even the professional translator David Prescott – who writes adequately elegant English on his own behalf in "Nihil Sine Causa" – becomes so stubbornly literal in rendering Maria de Menezes' "Diversified Ped-

## Side Effects

Brian Stableford

agogies" and Helena Coelho's "The Prophecy of the Water" into English that they become distinctly stilted. Such difficulties should not, however, be allowed to obscure the hard work that has gone into the collection, nor the heroic enterprise of the stories themselves, which remain artful and fascinating in spite of the grammatical infelicities which inevitably arise in word-by-word transmutation from one language to another.

If they are representative, the stories here suggest that the Portuguese literary tradition has something in common with the satirical traditions of such Eastern European nations as the former Czechoslovakia. The stories I liked best were straight-faced but scathingly sarcastic critiques of contemporary trends. The most vivid is Joao Barreiros' "Silent Night," in which a platoon of commandos embarks upon a search-and-destroy mission in Lapland, hunting down Santa Claus on behalf of the multinational corporations who want to keep the commercial spirit of Christmas intact. From the neat title to the heartfelt last line the story maintains a bright and steely cutting edge. Much more sober, but no less effective, is Maria de Menezes' account of politically correct teachers striving to cope with the problem of a cannibal child who grows to gargantuan dimensions while they are trying to figure out how to locate the root of his problem and restrain his antisocial habits while not making him feel bad about himself. This story too ends with a beautifully cruel turnabout.

Co-editor Macedo's "Tide Effects" is a blithely absurd and casually erotic tale

of a series of apocalyptic technological problems, each one of which is countered, in defiantly cavalier fashion, by a cure worse than the disease. Similar close attention is paid to the declared theme of the anthology by Luis Filipe Silva's "Rodney King," which is less melodramatic but equally sharp in its examination of the manipulative power of the media and the ways in which such power tends to burst through conventional moral boundaries. Silva takes the risk – and in terms of popular fiction it always is a risk – of steering his plot away from apocalyptic violence towards a much subtler climax, but a little conscience never comes amiss in works of art (and in spite of the condemnation of science fiction to the genre wilderness, it does regularly achieve a degree of artistry).

David Prescott's story of reversed causal flow is the quietest of all the stories in the anthology, but is all the more charming by virtue of the contrast. Brazilian author Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro – this year's winner of the premier Portuguese award for sf – is represented by "Secondary Mission," an abridgement of a novella which presumably reads better in its full-length version. It is the most conventional offering, being space fiction of a kind made abundantly familiar by the American sf of the last 40 years, but it takes care not only to provide its exploratory starship with a multinational crew (as even Americans do nowadays) but to examine their differences in the discussions which supplement the various unexpected events and discoveries that the plot throws up. Given that the other prize-winner, Helena Coelho, is so young it is hardly surprising that her story shows faults of inexperience – most crucially the failure to provide a plausible scientific explanation for the phenomena she describes – but her account of a primitive alien culture accidentally devastated by first contact with humans is written with such feeling and intensity that it is easy to understand why she received the award.

The third series of "Encounters" is planned for next year, after which the event will probably become biennial. It is not really a convention, being more a professional affair than a fanfest, but everyone interested is welcome and there is much to recommend it (a beautiful setting, good food, excellent company and lively discussion). It deserves support and with luck will grow, in time, to constitute a significant cross-cultural bridge. Both sets of Encounters have been subtitled "On the Edge of the Empire," ironically reflecting the fact that the self-billed "Western Edge of the [Old] World" is only a few miles from Cascais, but we live in an edgeless world now, or ought to. These enterprising Portuguese writers ought to be welcomed into the very heart of the international science fiction community.

Brian Stableford



## BOOKS RECEIVED



NOVEMBER  
1997

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Applegate, K. A. **The Capture**. "Animorphs, 6." Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-590-19643-X, 154pp, B-format paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile sf/horror novel, first published in the USA, 1997.) November 1997.

Attanasio, A. A. **Centuries**. "The towering novel of the next Millennium." New English Library, ISBN 0-340-66600-5, 437pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Warner, £6.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1997; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in Interzone 125 and by John Clute in Interzone 126.) 18th December 1997.

Balzac, Honoré de. **The Quest of the Absolute**. Translated by Ellen Marriage. Afterword by Christopher Smith. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-58-5, 226pp [plus Chronology and Afterword on unnumbered pages], B-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror novel, first published in France as *Le Recherche de l'absolu*, 1834; published previously by Dedalus in 1989, this is their second printing [or "new edition," as they call it]; the classic tale of an obsessed alchemist, it was written by Balzac during his *annus mirabilis* of 1834 when, in short order, he also produced what are probably his two most famous realistic novels, *Eugénie Grandet* and *Le Père Goriot* [this "étude philosophique" was, it seems, sandwiched between the two]; we're not told the provenance of this translation, but it

clearly dates from before 1989.) 8th January 1998.

Burton, LeVar. **Aftermath**. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60371-2, xii+274pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; a debut novel by an actor who has appeared in US TV shows from *Roots* to *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.) 20th November 1997.

Byrne, Eugene, and Kim Newman. **Back in the USSA**. Mark V. Ziesing [PO Box 76, Shingletown, CA 96088, USA], ISBN 0-929480-84-8, 356pp, hardcover, cover by Arnie Fenner, \$29.95. (Alternative-world humorous sf novel, first edition; it consists of a series of linked stories which first appeared in *Interzone* – all bar one, the concluding story, "On the Road," which is original to the book; we think it's very clever stuff, obviously.) No date shown: possibly an October publication, but received from the authors in November 1997.

Cannon, Peter. **Long Memories: Recollections of Frank Belknap Long**. Afterword by Ramsey Campbell. British Fantasy Society [2 Harwood St., Stockport SK4 1JJ], ISBN 0-952-4153-1-3, 68pp, paperbound, £5 [plus 50p postage & packing in the UK]. (Biographical reminiscences about the old age of the well-known American sf/horror writer; first edition; this is a fascinating but sad item: Frank Long, who had been H. P. Lovecraft's right-hand man in the 1920s, lived well into his 80s, his career as a professional author largely over after the heyday of the pulps and the waning of the paperback-original boom of the 1950s and 1960s; he lived with his eccentric wife Lyda in near-poverty, in New York City, and this nicely-written, AS-size, stapled booklet tells the tale from the point of view of one of those who attempted to care for him in the last years.) Late entry: October (?) publication, received in November 1997.

Chapman, Vera. **The Enchantresses**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06524-9, 223pp, hardcover, cover by Harvey Parker, £16.99. (Arthurian fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; Vera Chapman died a couple of years ago at the ripe old age of 98, and this posthumous book has been edited for publication by Mike Ashley [who has also published short stories and extracts by her in his anthologies of recent years].) 8th January 1998.

Clarke, I. F., ed. **The Great War with Germany, 1890-1914: Fictions and Fantasies of the**

**War-to-come**. "Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies." Liverpool University Press, ISBN 0-85323-642-9, xv+440pp, trade paperback, cover by Michael Mattingley, £12.95. (Sf anthology, first edition; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen]; a follow-up to the same editor's *The Tale of the Next Great War, 1871-1914* [1995], it contains stories and extracts [mainly the latter] from future-war fictions by Erskine Childers, Robert William Cole, Admiral Colomb, Headon Hill, William Le Queux, W. Heath Robinson, Saki, Louis Tracy, P. G. Wodehouse [!], Walter Wood and many others, including a number of German writers translated here for the first time; I would question the wisdom of including extracts from such well-known [and generally available] novels as Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* and Saki's *When William Came*, but, that quibble aside, this is another excellent, scholarly anthology by Professor Clarke: recommended.) Late entry: states "28 October" on the review slip, but received in November 1997.

Farmer, Philip José. **The World of Tiers, Volume Two: Behind the Walls of Terra, The Lavalite World, More Than Fire**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86377-2, 544pp, trade paperback, cover by Boris Vallejo, \$19.95. (Sf/fantasy omnibus, first edition; the three novels, "pocket-universe" adventures mainly concerning the hero Kickaha, were first published separately in 1970, 1977 and 1993; presumably there has been a *World of Tiers, Volume One* from the same publisher in the recent past, but we were not sent a copy.) 12th December 1997.

Feintuch, David. **Voices of Hope**. "The epic Seaforth Saga continues." Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-S16-9, 527pp, A-format paperback, cover by Stephen Youll, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; fifth in the sub-Horatio Hornblower space-opera series which began with *Midshipman's Hope*.) 6th November 1997.

Gier, Scott G. **First Victory: Genellan, Book 3**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40450-5, 433pp, A-format paperback, cover by Bob Eggleton, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; we saw the first volume of this planetary-romance series a couple of years ago, but we seem to have missed book two, which was called *In the Shadow of the Moon*.) 1st November 1997.

Gould, Stephen Jay. **Questioning the Millennium: A Rationalist's Guide to a Precisely Arbitrary Countdown**. Cape, ISBN

0-224-04389-7, 190pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Brief study [preface and three longish chapters] of the coming Millennium and its calendrical conundrums; first published in the USA, 1997; an elegant little book by one of the world's best science writers, it's dedicated: "In loving memory of my friend Carl Sagan.") No date shown: received in November 1997.

Grant, Richard. **In the Land of Winter**. Avon, ISBN 0-380-97465-7, 340pp, hardcover, cover by Mary Grandpré, \$24. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the author's last novel, *Tex and Molly in the Afterlife* [which we never saw] seems to have garnered a lot of praise.) Late entry: 8th October publication, received in November 1997.

Hambly, Barbara. **Icefalcon's Quest**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-39724-X, 307pp, hardcover, \$24. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) February 1998.

Harper, Tara K. **Wolf's Bane**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40634-6, 344pp, A-format paperback, cover by Eric Peterson, \$5.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first edition; it's the fifth in a series [future-set, on an invaded Earth, and involving telepathy] called "Tales of the Wolves"; earlier volumes, only the last of which we saw, were entitled *Wolfwalker*, *Shadow Leader*, *Storm Runner* and *Grayheart* [1996].) 1st November 1997.

Jones, Stephen, ed. **Dark of the Night: New Tales of Horror and the Supernatural**. Illustrated by Randy Broecker. Pumpkin Books [PO Box 297, Nottingham NG2 4GW], ISBN 1-901914-01-1, 306pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Horror anthology, first edition; there is a simultaneous signed, slipcased edition priced at £25 [not seen]; yet another Steve Jones anthology, from yet another new publisher; it's a nicely-produced volume with all-new stories by Stephen Baxter, Ramsey Campbell, David Case, Christopher Fowler, Stephen Laws, Paul J. McAuley, Richard Christian Matheson, Kim Newman, Nicholas Royle, Michael Marshall Smith, Douglas E. Winter and others.) Late entry: 30th October publication, received in November 1997.

Kearney, Paul. **The Heretic Kings: Book 2 of The Monarchies of God**. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60186-8, 320pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1996; reviewed by Paul Brazier in Interzone 117.) 20th November 1997.

Koontz, Dean. **Fear Nothing**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-2055-7,

373pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror/suspense novel, first edition [?]; Headline seem to have stopped sending us their Dean Koontz books as a matter of course; apparently they did a new, revised edition of his 1970s sf novel *Demon Seed* recently, but we never saw that; nor have we seen a finished copy, or a paperback, of his last new novel, *Sole Survivor*.) 11th December 1997.

Lee, Tanith. **Vivia**. Warner, ISBN 0-7515-2135-3, 395pp, A-format paperback, cover by Charles August Mengin, £6.99. (Horror/fantasy novel, first published in 1995.) 4th December 1997.

Le Guin, Ursula K. **A Fisherman of the Inland Sea**. Illustrated by Michael Storrings. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60239-2, 191pp, A-format paperback, cover by Steve Crisp, £5.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1994; reviewed by Ken Brown in Interzone 122.) 11th December 1997.

Lovegrove, James. **Days**. Orion/Phoenix, ISBN 0-75380-228-7, 329pp, B-format paperback, £6.99. (Sf/horror novel, first edition; Lovegrove's second solo novel, following *The Hope* [1990] — that one was about a giant ship, while this one is about a giant department store.) 17th November 1997.

Lumley, Brian. **The House of Doors: Second Visit**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-70823-9, 408pp, hardcover, cover by George Underwood, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition; a sequel to *The House of Doors* [1990].) 4th December 1997.

McCaffrey, Anne. **Black Horses for the King**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-40881-0, 217pp, B-format paperback, cover by David Shannon, \$10.95. (Juvenile Arthurian historical novel, first published in 1996; we haven't seen this before, but apparently there was a US hardcover edition last year; it's an expansion of the short story "Black Horses for a King" which originally appeared in Jane Yolen's *Camelot* anthology [1995]; basically a tale about the shoeing of Lord Arto's horses, it seems to have no overt fantasy content.) Late entry: 1st September publication, received in November 1997.

McDonald, Ian. **Sacrifice of Fools**. Vista, ISBN 0-575-60059-4, 286pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mike Posen, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1996; reviewed by Paul McAuley in Interzone 118.) 11th December 1997.

Martin, George R. R. **A Game of Thrones: Book One of A Song of Ice and Fire**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-647988-X, 694pp, A-format paperback, cover by Jim Burns, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1996; a blockbuster, in standard heroic-fantasy mould, by an author hitherto best known for his sf, his TV scripts and his "Wild Cards" shared-world anthologies; reviewed by Gwyneth Jones in Interzone 112.) 5th January 1998.

Matheson, Richard. **I Am Legend**. Tor/Orb, ISBN 0-312-86504-X, 317pp, trade paperback, \$12.95. (Sf/horror novel, first published in the USA, 1954; first publication in this omnibus form, 1995; this attractive reissue of Matheson's best-known novel [about to be filmed yet again, the publishers tell us, with Arnold Schwarzenegger in the lead] also contains ten short stories, ranging in original copyright date from 1951 to 1989.) Late entry: 20th October publication, received in November 1997.

Meynard, Yves. **The Book of Knights**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86482-S, 222pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the author is French-Canadian, writer of half a dozen books to date, and this is described as "his first fantasy novel written in English"; rather oddly, the publishers bill him as "a new voice, powerful and distinct ... from the culture that created the literary fairy tale and the courtly romance"; well, we know what they mean, but surely there was never anything particularly Quebecois about the French contes des fées...?) February 1998.

Mirbeau, Octave. **Torture Garden**. Translated by Michael Richardson. Introduction by Brian Stableford. Dedalus, ISBN 1-873982-S3-4, 206pp, B-format paperback, £7.99. (Horror novel, first published in France as *Le Jardin des supplices*, 1899; a philosophical tale of terror, and a classic of the perverse, it was published previously in English by Dedalus in a different translation, 1990 [from which year Stableford's introduction dates]; this new translation, which first appeared in 1995 and of which this is the second printing, drops the definite article from the novel's title.) 8th January 1998.

Moorcock, Michael. **The War Amongst the Angels: An Autobiographical Story**. Avon, ISBN 0-380-97597-1, 298pp, hardcover, cover by Bill Binger, \$24. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the UK, 1996; the follow-up to

*Blood and Fabulous Harbours*, it's dedicated to the memories of Harrison Ainsworth, Captain Marryat, George Meredith and Gerald Kersh — a mixed bunch!; reviewed by Chris Gilmore in Interzone 114.) 5th November 1997.

Moore, Alan. **Voice of the Fire**. "A dark midwinter tale from the heart of England." Indigo, ISBN 0-575-40055-2, 320pp, B-format paperback, cover by Robert Mason, £5.99. (Collection of linked stories by a leading sf/fantasy graphic novelist; first published in 1996; Moore's long-awaited debut "novel," a sequence of tales strung along a 6,000-year timeline in the Midlands city of Northampton, it's written in an intense, poetic manner, at times reminiscent of Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, at times of Iain Sinclair's London novels; uncompromisingly "local," and as "English" as Garner or Holdstock; reviewed by Gwyneth Jones in Interzone 116.) 20th November 1997.

Nicholls, Stan. **The Shadow of the Sorcerer**. "The second book in the exciting trilogy, *The Nightshade Chronicles*." Point Fantasy, ISBN 0-590-13971-1, 245pp, A-format paperback, cover by David Wyatt, £3.99. (Young-adult fantasy novel, first edition.) November 1997.

Pepper, Mark. **Man on a Murder Cycle**. Hodder & Stoughton, ISBN 0-340-69623-0, 404pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror novel, first edition; the author's second novel, following *The Short Cut* [1996].) 28th November 1997.

Peyton, K. M. **Unquiet Spirits**. Scholastic Press, ISBN 0-590-S4231-1, 216pp, B-format paperback, cover by Michael Mascaro, £4.99. (Juvenile horror novel, first edition.) November 1997.

Rankin, Robert. **The Brentford Chainstore Massacre**. "The fifth novel in the now legendary Brentford Trilogy." Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-40707-6, 269pp, hardcover, cover by Ian Murray, £16.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first edition.) 11th December 1997.

Rankin, Robert. **Sprout Mask Replica**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14356-1, 351pp, A-format paperback, cover by Ian Murray, £5.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1997.) 11th December 1997.

Rees, Celia. **The Vanished**. Point Horror, ISBN 0-590-19535-2, 244pp, A-format paperback, £3.50. (Young-adult horror novel, first edition.) November 1997.

Rice, Anne. **The Feast of All Saints**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-926947-3, 640pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Historical "gothic" novel, first published in the USA, 1979; there was a previous UK paperback edition from Penguin Books [1982].) 4th December 1997.

Scott, Melissa. **Night Sky Mine**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-86156-7, 384pp, trade paperback, \$14.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Gwyneth Jones in Interzone 113.) 18th November 1997.

Staig, Laurence. **Technofear: A Collection of Tales of Tomorrow**. Scholastic Press, ISBN 0-590-54230-3, 154pp, B-format paperback, £4.99. (Juvenile sf collection, first edition; it contains seven stories, all presumably original to the book.) November 1997.

Stasheff, Christopher. **My Son, the Wizard: Book V of A Wizard in Rhyme**. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-37602-1, 297pp, B-format paperback, cover by Daniel Horn, \$11.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 1st November 1997.

Stine, R. L. **Goosebumps TV Special 5: My Hairiest Adventure, It Came From Beneath the Sink!** "2 Goosebumps books as seen on BBC TV." Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-590-19868-8, 240pp, B-format paperback, £4.99. (Juvenile horror omnibus, first edition; the novels originally were published separately in the USA, in 1994 and 1995; both are copyright "Parachute Press, Inc.") November 1997.

Stine, R. L. **How to Kill a Monster**. "Goosebumps, 46." Scholastic/Hippo, ISBN 0-590-19645-6, 114pp, B-format paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile horror novel, first published in the USA, 1996; it is copyright "Parachute Press, Inc.") November 1997.

Tepper, Sheri S. **Gibbon's Decline and Fall**. Voyager, ISBN 0-00-648268-6, 465pp, A-format paperback, cover by Stuart Bodek, £6.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1996; reviewed by Gwyneth Jones in Interzone 112.) 1st December 1997.

Tolkien, J. R. R. **Roverandom**. Edited by Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond. Harper-Collins, ISBN 0-261-10353-9, xxii+106pp, hardcover, cover by the author, £12.99. (Juvenile fantasy novella, first edition; illustrated with five plates of drawings and paintings by the author; written for his young son in 1925, this fairy tale about a dog is published

here for the first time and thus represents yet another "last" Tolkien book; the actual text fills about 85 pages, and there are copious notes by the editors.) 5th January 1998.

Waitman, Katie. **The Merro Tree.** "Del Rey Discovery of the Year." Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41436-5, 437pp, A-format paperback, cover by Cliff Nielsen, \$5.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a debut novel by a new American writer [her name is given as Katharine L. Waitman in the copyright statement], it's about art and censorship in a future galactic setting.) Late entry: 1st October publication, received in November 1997.

Bassom, David. **Creating Babylon 5.** Foreword by J. Michael Straczynski. Del Rey, ISBN 0-345-41452-7, 143pp, very large-format paperback, \$18. (Copiously illustrated companion to sf television series created by J. Michael Straczynski; first published in the UK, 1996.) Late entry: 3rd October publication, received in November 1997.

Emerson, Ru. **The Empty Throne.** "Xena: Warrior Princess." HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-651150-3, 231pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1996; it's based on the pseudo-Greek mythological series [a companion to Hercules: The Legendary Journeys] created by John Schulan and Robert Tapert.) 1st December 1997.

Howard, Stella. **Prophecy of Darkness.** "Xena: Warrior Princess." HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-651149-X, 215pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy TV-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; based on the series created by John Schulan and Robert Tapert; this one has very much larger print, and is therefore considerably shorter, than the first novel in the sequence [see under Ru Emerson, above].) 1st December 1997.

Jordan, Robert, and Teresa Patterson. **The World of Robert Jordan's The Wheel of Time.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-S05-3, 304pp, hardcover, cover by Ellisa Mitchell, £25. (Copiously illustrated, large-format companion to the series of fantasy novels by Jordan; first published in the USA, 1997; the artwork is by Todd Cameron Hamilton, John M. Ford, Tom Cauty, Darrell K. Sweet and others; this is a Bill Fawcett & Associates packaged book; "Robert Jordan" [real name James

Webb, Wendy, and Charles Grant, eds. **Gothic Ghosts.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-86130-3, 256pp, hardcover, \$23.95. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains all-new tales, in a traditional "ghost-story" vein, by Matthew J. Costello, Esther M. Friesner, Rick Hautala, Nancy Holder, Rick Kennet, Kathryn Ptacek, Carrie Richerson, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, Brian Stableford, Brad Strickland, Lucy Taylor, Robert E. Vardeman and others.) 12th November 1997.

Weis, Margaret, and Don Perrin. **Hung Out.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-06170-7, 384pp, hardcover, cover by Les Edwards, £16.99. (Sf novel, first edition [?]; proof copy

received; a third novel about Xris Cyborg and his Mag Force 7 team, in the adventure series which began with *The Knights of the Black Earth* and *Robot Blues*.) 8th January 1998.

Williams, Michael. **Allamanda.** New English Library, ISBN 0-340-67449-0, 436pp, A-format paperback, cover by Mick van Houten, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1997; a follow-up to the author's previous book, *Arcady*.) 4th December 1997.

Winter, Douglas E., ed. **Millennium.** Voyager, ISBN 0-00-649833-7, 627pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA as

*Revelations*, 1997; all-original stories which explore "the workings of the human heart in the ten decades that comprise the twentieth century"; the contributors include Clive Barker, Poppy Z. Brite, Ramsey Campbell, Charles Grant, Joe R. Lansdale, Elizabeth Massie, David Morrell, Whitley Strieber and F. Paul Wilson; reviewed by David Mathew in *Interzone* 123.) 1st December 1997.

Wylie, Jonathan. **Magister.** Orbit, ISBN 1-85723-S15-0, 388pp, A-format paperback, £6.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; inspired by the life of the composer Arnold Bax; "Jonathan Wylie" is a pseudonym of Mark and Julia Smith.) 4th December 1997.

## Spinoffery

This is a list of all books received that fall into those sub-types of sf, fantasy and horror which may be termed novelizations, recursive fictions, spinoffs, sequels by other hands, shared worlds and sharecrops (including non-fiction about shared worlds, films and TV, etc.). The collective term "Spinoffery" is used for the sake of brevity.

Rigney, Jr., born 1948] has come a long way from the days when he was a mere writer of "Conan" spinoffs: he is now, quite possibly, the best-selling fantasy novelist in the world.) 13th November 1997.

McCaffrey, Anne, and Margaret Ball. **Acorna: The Unicorn Girl.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14621-8, 415pp, A-format paperback, cover by Fred Gambino, £5.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1997; this is possibly a sharecrop - i.e. written by Ball with McCaffrey's indulgence.) 9th January 1998.

Miller, Rand, with David Wingrove. **Myst: The Book of D'Ni.** Bantam Press, ISBN 0-S93-04026-0, 318pp, hardcover, £17.99. (Fantasy novel, based on a CD-ROM game, first published in the USA, 1997; Rand Miller is the game's creator, and Wingrove probably has written the book; third in the series that began with *Myst: The Book of Atrus* [1995]; it's a strange-looking thing, sans dust-jacket and printed on artificially "browned" paper in order to resemble some old grimoire.) 11th December 1997.

Miller, Rand, with David Wingrove. **Myst: The Book of Ti'ana.** Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14387-1, 478pp, A-format paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, based on a CD-ROM game, first published in the USA, 1996; second in the series that began with *Myst: The Book of Atrus* [1995]; presum-

ably there was a UK hardcover edition in 1996, but we were not sent it.) 13th November 1997.

Pratchett, Terry. **Soul Music: The Illustrated Screenplay.** "Terry Pratchett's Discworld." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-14556-4, 127pp, large-format paperback, £9.99. (TV-serial script, based on the 1994 humorous fantasy novel by Pratchett; first edition; the script is for the second of two animated serials produced within the last year by Channel Four Television/Cosgrove Hall Films [if a similar "illustrated screenplay" has been published for the first serial, *Wyrd Sisters*, we have not been sent it]; it's not clear who actually wrote this script - Pratchett himself; more likely it's by Martin Jameson, whose name is given in small print on the back cover as "adapter" of the TV version; nor is it clear who the cartoony-style illustrations are by - not a single artist is named, but presumably the pictures are a Cosgrove Hall team effort under the guidance of producer and director Jean Flynn.) 11th December 1997.

Ramer, Samuel. **Coping With Your Trekkie: What You Need to Know to Survive a Relationship With a Star Trek Fanatic.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-7642-0, xviii+235pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Humorous primer, or "bluffer's guide," to the Star Trek TV series and its spinoffs;

first published in the USA, 1997; it is unillustrated and unauthorized.) 13th January "1997" (i.e. 1998).

Shapiro, Marc. **What's Your X-Files I.Q.?: Over 1000 Questions and Answers for Every X-Files Trivia Buff.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-5940-2, x+150pp, B-format paperback, £5.99. (Quiz-book keyed to the sf/horror TV series *The X-Files*; first published in the USA, 1997.) 13th January "1997" (i.e. 1998).

Stoker, Bram. **Dracula, or The Un-Dead: A Play in Prologue and Five Acts.** Edited by Sylvia Starshine. Pumpkin Books [PO Box 297, Nottingham NG2 4GW], ISBN 1-901914-04-6, xxxix+277pp, hardcover, £16.99. (Horror dramatization, based on the novel *Dracula* [1897]; first edition; there is a simultaneous signed [by the editor], slipcased edition priced at £27.50 [not seen]; there are eight pages of photographs; this is a labour of love on Sylvia Starshine's part: an exhaustively transcribed and annotated edition of the only surviving copy of Bram Stoker's dramatized version of *Dracula*, held by the British Library in the Lord Chamberlain's Play List for 1897; the play did enjoy a few performances at the time, though they were not adjudged a success.) Late entry: 30th October publication, received in November 1997.

Zahn, Timothy. **Specter of the Past.** "Star Wars." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-03990-4, 344pp, hardcover, cover by Drew Struzan, £12.99. (Sf movie-series spinoff novel, first published in the USA, 1997; the American edition was billed as "The Hand of Thrawn, Book 1," though this UK edition is not so described.) 11th December 1997.



## ALBEDO ONE: WINNER OF EUROPEAN SCIENCE FICTION AWARD

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# Interzone 1997 Popularity Poll

It's time once again for our annual popularity poll, so we'd be grateful if readers could let us know their thoughts on the contents of issues 115 to 126 inclusive (no need to wait until you've read the latest two issues, as they will count towards *next* year's poll). We'd appreciate it if you could send us answers to the following questions. Write or type your replies on any piece of paper and send them to us before the deadline of **1st April 1998**.

- 1) Which stories in *Interzone* issues 115-126 inclusive (i.e. those with a 1997 cover date) did you particularly like?
- 2) Which stories in *Interzone* issues 115-126 inclusive did you particularly dislike (if any)?

Any further comments about our non-fiction articles and illustrations, or any other aspect of the magazine, would also be most welcome. We'll report the results later in the year.

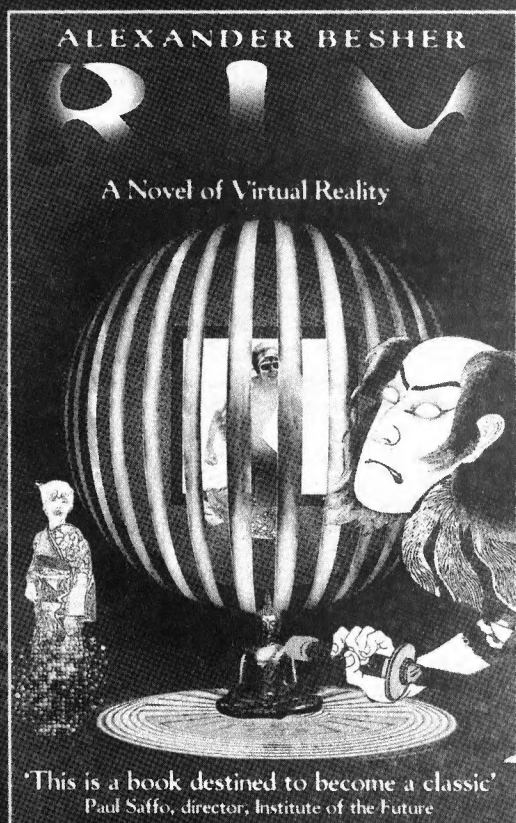


## COMING NEXT MONTH

A couple of surprise "celebrity" names make their first-ever appearances in *Interzone*. There will also be excellent stories by regulars Sarah Ash and Eric Brown, and another provocative article by our new US columnist Gary Westfahl. Plus all our usual features and reviews. So watch out for the March *Interzone*, number 129, on sale in February.

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